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INTRODUCTION

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Historical, temporal and contemporary trends on gender and media

Research on media and gender has proliferated during the last decades, both quantitatively and geographically across different regions of the world. This generous development has come either from feminist approaches that have focused on the reproduction of inequality between men and women in media products and in production structures, or from sociocultural and critical approaches within academia that consider gender a category that transcends binary divides and encompasses sexualities and sexual identities, with an increased attention to LGBTQI people. The proliferation has resulted in more intensified debates and the questioning and/or fortifying of concepts to better study issues within the broad field of gender and media. The field has particularly witnessed an increase in an intersectional approach, demonstrating how people have multiple identities that interact with one another and therefore gender identities and roles should not be studied in isolation but rather in relation to other axes such as class, race, and ethnicity, sexuality, age, disability or nationality.

It has been acknowledged that broader ideological contexts do have an extraordinary impact on shaping the ideas that we share about ourselves as

gendered human beings. Finally the formulation of concepts such as ‘post-feminism’ – even though the accuracy of words beginning with the prefix ‘post’ may always be deemed suspicious and its polysemy has been highlighted by the promoters of the term – has helped us to better understand the link between the ways of thinking about and living in gender and the pressure put on individuals to self-branding and consume in neo-liberalist societies. Understood not only as a production system but also as constituting social relationships, neo-liberalism invokes gender as a specific category to continually ‘work on’ oneself in a specific way. Political relationships are rendered invisible and the failures in gender performance – and in other terrains –, may be easily charged to those excluded or marginalized in the gender system. In other words, gender identity and its surrounding expectations are one of the primary devices of what Byung-Chul Han (2014) has labelled as *psychopolitics*, echoing Foucault’s definition of *biopolitics* – which Han considers a previous governance system – but stressing its much higher efficacy in erasing the traces of social antagonism and securing the internalization of a continuous work of self-exploitation and surveillance.

This accumulation of diverse perspectives and approaches, the growing administrative concern for managing identities and the need to keep on monitoring the structural and sentimental gender inequalities require a reconsideration of the concepts that guide contemporary research. This is why this Special Issue focuses on contemporary research that adopts a diachronic point of view to observe shifts in media structures and representations in relation to gender and sexuality, and on those investigations that attempt to tackle new media practices and opportunities.

STRUCTURE OF THE ISSUE

The Special Issue is divided into two sections. The first one includes work that features a historical or a temporal dimension in its analysis of gender and media and that explores how shifts and transformations may affect practices of production and gender representation. There is a particular attention to work that examines how journalism has both furthered and hampered sociocultural and political change for people who are not white, heterosexual and male. As this issue demonstrates, shifts and transformations do not automatically imply progression and emancipation. These articles, above all, demonstrate the need for gender and media scholars to keep a close watch on practices and processes in media and popular culture, reveal and understand the sociocultural implications for how gender and sexuality are shaped and experienced in and through media.

The second section engages in the weighty debate of the possibilities created by the democratization of content production enabled by digital media and social networks. Specifically, this issue proposes insights into the ways in which young people use these new communication tools for solidary actions and produce potentially transformative outputs in gender terms. Thus, some emphasis is placed on activists and their resistance to stereotypes. At the same time, we would not like to understate how so-called ‘new media’ reproduce former inequalities or enable new forms of oppression – neither can be isolated from offline experiences and traditional media – and some of the articles will delve interestingly into these matters.

SHIFTS AND TRANSFORMATIONS IN MEDIA AND POPULAR CULTURE

Media and popular culture have been key sites to assess how societies strive for gender equality, deal with gender and sexual diversity and emancipate those groups who have been traditionally discriminated against. On the one hand, scholars have been keen to point out the resistant and/or the emancipatory potential of popular media to criticize patriarchal and heteronormative representations of women and LGBTQIs (e.g., Smith 2013). Yet, at the same time, studies have shown a significant underrepresentation of women in specific cultural and media industries (Byerly 2011). Take, for example, the film industry. In many countries, this industry is controlled by men. Smith et al. (2014) found that only 7 per cent of the films produced between 2010 and 2013 in a sample of thirteen countries with a relevant film industry were directed by women and only a fifth of the scripts were produced or written by women.¹ Further, studies have found a stubborn reiteration of hegemonic gender discourses in production processes and in media texts (e.g., Avila-Saavedra 2009).

Gerbner (1978) already raised the issue by pointing out various contextual elements that precluded the representation of women in media to change. Written when television was the key medium in western society, he argued that television culture worked through obstructing the professional and socio-cultural emancipation of women by discrediting feminists, isolating and segregating women's affairs and by normalizing the exploitation of women's bodies. Yet, can we still claim the situation to be the same when taking into account, on the one hand, how much the media landscape has changed and, on the other, how several western societies have invested in changing policies and laws to meet the demands of civil society organizations that fight for women and LGBTQI rights?

With this special issue, we want to address the historical and temporal dimensions of these topics. Starting from the notion that contemporary trends are best understood through the lenses of its history and context, the aim is to explore the notion of shifts and transformations in relation to media and popular culture and assess how it may have affected professional gender relations, the way in which gender is negotiated in the production processes or the representational practices of how to deal with gender and sexual diversity.

THE ARTICLES OF THIS SECTION

In 'Same-sex love in times of Paedophilia: The articulation of homosexuality with child abuse in late 1990s Flemish print media', Vanlee, Van Bauwel and Dhaenens take the readers back to the 1990s. While Belgium was recovering from the Dutroux affair, a moral panic that came from the fear for paedophilia started to dominate the public debate. The authors demonstrate how this involved ramifications for the LGBTQI community as the mediated public debate in the Flemish press engaged in articulating homosexuality with paedophilia. The authors show how even though the dominant discourse on homosexuality no longer articulated homosexuality as a pathology and overt homophobia was publicly rejected, the popular belief that homosexuality was related to paedophilia still informed plenty of journal articles and served as an opportunistic source to publicly discredit publicly known figures.

Carratalá's work in 'The voices of journalism and the LGBTQI movement in response to violence among same-sex couples: towards the construction

1. The countries whose feature film production has been analysed in this study are Australia, Brazil, China, France, Germany, India, Japan, Russia, South Korea and the United Kingdom.

of a social problem?’ demonstrates how views on LGBTQI identities within a broader western perspective have changed and progressed towards a more inclusive and equal assessment of sexual diversity. Furthermore, he points out the productive potential of the mediated public sphere to bring pressing issues to our attention that need political and social action. The issue at stake in this article is intragender violence – violence committed in the context of a same-sex relationship. Examining the discourses offered by two parties that are able to address the issue – i.e. civil society organizations involved with LGBTQI rights and media stakeholders – he found that journalists were better at presenting a clear and shared approach to the issue, whereas LGBTQI organizations offered more contradictory accounts on the issue.

‘Gender politics and the “war of narratives”: Russian TV-news in the times of conflict in Ukraine’ by Voronova illustrates poignantly how transformations do not automatically mean progress or emancipation. She analysed the news broadcasts of television channels that are controlled by the Russian government. By focusing on news reports that were aired in 2015, she is able to examine the discourses used to report on the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and the tense relationship between Russia and Europe. What is remarkable is how TV channels used essentialist gendering as a discursive tool to (re-)masculinize the image of Russia. By representing the Russian state and its military as embodying a traditional and conservative masculinity that needs to be desired and ‘feminizing’ Ukraine and Europe, they not only reiterate binary and hierarchical gender perspectives but also anchor them in international politics on the one hand and the functioning of journalism on the other.

The bullfighting metaphor in Madonna’s music videos serves Tortajada, Willem and Araüna as a case to analyse the ideological dimension of the gender discourse in the artist’s music videos across the last 30 years. ‘From bullfighter’s lover to female matador: the evolution in Madonna’s gender displays through her music videos’ explores how this artist appeared in her former music videos as the victim of a passionate male ‘torero’, while instead she has recently incarnated a bullfighter herself. Beating and strangling men dressed as bulls, Madonna performs as the – typically male – violent figure of the torero, keeping at the same time the sexiness in her dress and contortions. The analysis of these videos, together with a broader look at her promotional appearances, evinces the character of Madonna as a frontrunner postfeminist icon and a contradictory public persona in terms of the emancipation from gender normativity.

Finally, De Vuyst aims at observing whether the emergence of digital media in journalism and the so-called media convergence has increased opportunities for professional women into this field in terms of participation and representation. Her article ‘Shifting gender gaps in journalism? A longitudinal study on gender segregation in a converging media environment’ is based on a large-scale series of surveys conducted in the years 2003, 2008 and 2013 with journalists working in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium. The study finds that the – allegedly participatory – online journalism mirrors the same, if not more, inequalities of standard journalism, besides showing a higher vertical segregation, with fewer women in decision-making levels. Moreover, the longitudinal perspective shows how this gender gap is expanding over time, even if women journalists seem to express more awareness of the importance of new media than their male colleagues.

DIGITAL MEDIA AND THE GLORIFICATION OF THE ALL-POWERFUL PROSUMER

Reflecting on young people without taking into account their investment in social networks and their dependence on the Internet has become almost impossible nowadays. Dubbed as digital natives, most young people have an Internet connection and take part in a few social networks such as Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook or Twitter. For some authors, this is accompanied by the emergence of a society of prosumers (Jenkins 2001), in which highly skilled children and teenagers can empower themselves through the information and relational capabilities of social media and distribute and share positive messages (Mihailidis and Thevenin 2013). Such approaches have fuelled optimist terminologies such as Technologies for Empowerment and Participation (TEP), which consider social media as enabling a democratized and participatory culture (Kellner and Gooyong 2009) and a turnabout of traditional hierarchies. This democratization is also relevant for the distribution of non-heteronormative representations and experiences of gender and sexuality in public spaces. This may eventually lead to an opportunity to forge bonds between diverse sexualities and to promote sexual rights and responsibilities (De Ridder 2017).

Even though this issue focuses on the positive opportunities provided by new media, we do not want to overlook more critical views on the consequences of social networks for young people and society in general. First, the reproduction of strict heteronormative values might still be hegemonic online and offline. Second, young people might feel pressure to portray themselves and judge others according to these very stereotyped standards (Banet-Waiser 2011). Hyperfeminine self-portrayals, at the same time, seem to predispose adolescent girls to self-sexualization (Oosten et al. 2017) and, at the same time, to sexting (Oosten and Vandenbosch 2017) – which does not need to be harmful, except if sexual violence or shaming towards women is reproduced in this context. According to Sarabia and Estévez (2016), sexualization online might make young users more vulnerable, and yet our studies should focus on the societal practices and beliefs that sometimes render young people defenceless. Third, the sexist commentary and exposure to sexual abuses online might amplify processes of double-standardization and victim-blaming, intertwined with harm offline. Slut-shaming and sexual sanctions affect especially women and sexual minorities (Wotanis and McMillan 2014). In fact, even alternative and subversive presentations online might be subject to public scandal in the everyday settings of young people. Scandalization, proliferated through the network, works as a process through which social norms are confirmed and boundaries are redrawn (Poerksen and Detel 2014) in pluralistic societies in which there is not an institutional prescription about unified beliefs and moral rules. Therefore, through this scandalization (some) subjects are reinstating patriarchal and classist norms through – sometimes – hate speeches online. Some authors have found out distinct gendered patterns of harassment online, with girls being more indirect and polite than boys (Dueñas et al. 2016). Finally, social networks together with postfeminist sensibilities are promoting a continuously and time-consuming work of self-branding that dilutes professional and personal spaces and keeps a lot of women's aspirational work invisible and unpaid (Duffy 2017). However, we should also be careful that research does not re-victimize girls since most of the public debate and academic work on young people and social media is based on 'what girls do online' (and in which ways it causes harm to them).

In this section we have selected some articles that focus on risks prompted by social inequalities and gender double standards but, most importantly, we have included works that stress the centrality of new media in building transformative relationships and gender representations.

THE ARTICLES OF THIS SECTION

Moreno Segarra and Bernárdez Rodal take a critical stance to explore the neglected format of parody beauty YouTube tutorials. Through these videos, which might be considered as a tool for disciplining female bodies, Spanish young vloggers stereotype young underclass and redraw class boundaries in a country with one of the highest rates of NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) of the OCDE. 'How to be a "choni": Tutorial videos, class and gender in Spanish's economic recession' focuses on the non-defined yet ubiquitous figure of the *choni* (female underclass), comparing it to the British image of the *chavette*, to show the crucial role that gender plays in the stigmatization of specific identities. In these videos, class markers are euphemistically transferred to dismissed cultural and style elements, which are racialized and gendered. According to this work, discourses that blame individuals for their own poverty have succeeded in Spain during the years of economic recession, triggered by the need of the middle classes to be distinguished from the lower classes.

In 'Are victims to blame? Youth, gender and moral discourse on risk', Jorge and Farrugia focus on how online risk is assessed in moral terms by young people. This article built upon focus groups from nine different European countries and tackles how children interpret problematic situations in relation to social networking sites practices. Some of the outcomes point to the fact that even if young users sympathize with the victims of online aggression or cyber bullying, at the same time they blame them for not being savvy enough or cautious. If these young victims happen to be girls, or involved in sexting activities, they are deemed co-responsible for the harm that they might have suffered. Thus, a double (genderized) standard is reproduced in young Europeans' moral understanding of Internet use. According to the authors, this bias, which considers women more vulnerable to aggression, resonates in some safety campaigns based on ideas of self-responsibility and individualization that have tended to blame the victims instead of denouncing the causes for inequality.

"Fight like a girl": Virtual bedroom culture in public high school occupations in Brazil' delves into the Occupy Movement in São Paulo in 2015. Castilho and Romancini apply the classic Cultural Studies' concept of the *bedroom culture* to observe the role of feminism carried by young girls in this mobilization. Through focus groups including girls who participated in the High School movement, the authors sustain that involvement with activism has increased girls' gender consciousness. The social networks developed during the demonstrations and the contact with feminist organizations have produced engaged information that has been disseminated through the Internet. The intertwining of online and offline experiences has proven in this case to have a strong potential to develop feminist resistances to the current order. For Castilho and Romancini, the social media was especially relevant for the feminist formation of those girls who had less family support or income.

Finally, Caldeira and De Ridder discuss the possibilities of a network based on photographs such as Instagram to exhibit non-normative images

of women's bodies. Through the analysis of a particular account created by a plus-size and feminist model, 'Representing diverse femininities on Instagram: A case study of the body-positive @effyourbeautystandards Instagram account' explores the politics of everyday selfies, understanding (some of) them as manifestations of 'empowering exhibitionism'. In this sense, @effyourbeautystandards circulates images of intersectional non-conforming bodies as self-representations inscribed in a fourth-wave feminist activism. Yet highlighting the potential of this initiative to transcend strict body images, the authors also problematize postfeminist and consumerist sensibilities underlying @effyourbeautystandards images since they overlap with mainstream media in the idea that women need to perform femininity through fashion and sexiness.

This is the second special issue on gender published by the *Catalan Journal of Communication and Cultural Studies*. On that very first related special issue, Tortajada and Van Bauwel (2012) claimed, quoting many authors, that feminist research – and we would add, gender research in broader terms – should be involved in people's networks and social movements, support social activism and claims for equality, be connected to everyday life and promote reflexivity, personal transformation and solidarity. We hope that with this issue we have taken a step towards this ambitious, yet necessary commitment for academia. However, we would have liked to have some articles on transgender and gender non-conforming people. These identities challenge cisnormativity and the existence of gender as a fixed category, but the American Psychiatric Association labelled them until 2013 as 'gender identity disorder'. This term was only removed from the DSM in 2013, and yet the replacement of the word for 'gender dysphoria' (Nadal 2017) is nonetheless disappointing and still derogative. Therefore, including research on gender non-conformity, together with a stronger stress on intersectionality (different ability statuses, race, chronic illnesses [...]), is our suggestion for what we hope will be a third special issue dedicated to *Gender and Media in the Catalan Journal of Communication and Cultural Studies*.

ERRATA

An error has been printed in the previous Issue CJCS 9.1 (Victor Navarra Viewpoint):

The reference on p. 128 (Navarro-Remesal 2016: 7) is incorrect. It refers to (Pérez Dolset 2016: 7).

We would also like to add the following acknowledgements for the same article: Project LUDOLITERACY was funded by Plan Nacional de i+d Ministerio de Economía, Industria y Competividad. Ref. CSO2014-57302-P.

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Same-sex love in times of Dutroux: The articulation of homosexuality with child abuse in late 1990s' Flemish print media

ABSTRACT

In this article, we point to the peculiar conjuncture between the increased emancipation of gay men and lesbian women in late 1990s' Belgium, and the noted impact of the contemporaneous Dutroux affair on the construction of sexual diversity in the country. Approaching the case as a moral panic, we conducted a discourse analysis of the associated coverage in four mainstream Flemish newspapers, focusing on the articulation of homosexuality with child abuse. In doing so, we show how the folk devil is an a posteriori construct, operating as an empty signifier rather than a defined character, rendering it open to recuperation by other discourses. Hence, we illustrate how the conspiratorial construction of the folk devil in the Dutroux affair provided a space to articulate homosexuality with while still refraining from engaging in an explicitly homophobic rhetoric. Finally, we point to how historical contingencies inhibited the presence of moral entrepreneurs, pointing to moral opportunists as discursive agents instead.

KEYWORDS

homophobia
discourse analysis
Dutroux affair
child abuse
flanders
Flemish media

1. As a federal state, Belgium has three linguistic and cultural groups: the francophone, Dutch-speaking and German-speaking communities. Although the Dutroux affair was covered in all three communities, this article focuses on coverage in the Dutch-language Flemish media.
2. Connerotte had attended a charity spaghetti dinner for the victims, where he received a pen as a gift for his recent marriage. Dutroux's defence cited this event as an infringement of his impartiality and had the cassation court substitute the popular magistrate.

INTRODUCTION

The apprehension of Marc Dutroux in 1996 and the subsequent discovery of the scale of his crimes plunged Belgium¹ into an unprecedented crisis (Leurs 2009: 408; Bogaerts and Vanheule 2005: 49; Vasterman 2005). The dimensions hereof were manifold: ranging from conspiracy-laden theories about the paedophile murderer's presumed connections to the Belgian political elite to widespread fears of paedophiles still on the loose (Leurs 2009: 396; Vasterman 2005; Walgrave and Manssens 1998: 29).

Arguably constituting one of Belgium's most important mediatized events in recent history, the Dutroux affair has given way to ample academic research, prominently focusing on the formative role of the media in shaping the public reaction to the Dutroux affair (e.g. Leurs 2009; Vasterman 2005; Critcher 2002; Walgrave and Manssens 1998; Lippens 1998). Indeed, the high mediatization of both the apprehension and the subsequent investigation and handling of the case by Belgian law enforcement has been brought into relation with the formation of 'The White March' ('De Witte Mars'), a protest rally held on 20 October 1996 in which a staggering 300,000 Belgians participated (Walgrave and Manssens 1998: 2; Leurs 2009: 396), illustrating the widespread social impact of the event. While studies such as these (e.g. Leurs 2009; Vasterman 2005; Critcher 2002; Walgrave and Manssens 1998; Lippens 1998) produce valuable insights into the role of media in civil participation in modern democracies, they approach the Dutroux affair as an abstract media event, focusing on the interrelation between media and *the people* at large rather than discourses contained in media coverage of the events. Authors such as Ronny Lippens (2003: 207), however, point to the historical contingency of the *White March* by illustrating the profound dissemination and circulation of conspiratorial discourse in the preceding decade in Belgium, tracing the 'spontaneous' indignation back to earlier scandals and affairs (for an overview of these affairs, see: Punch 2005).

Indeed, it should be noted that some of the factors contributing towards the mobilization of a profoundly heterogeneous group of 300,000 Belgians are at least to some degree connected to conspiratorial discourse. Ostensibly, the instigation for the march was the substitution of Jean Marc Connerotte, the magistrate in charge of the investigation on grounds of impartiality.² The explanatory narratives hereof, however, were often grounded in a conspiratorial rhetoric, by referring to Connerotte's claim at the onset of the investigation that he would get to the bottom of the case 'if they would let him' (Lippens 2003: 207). Throughout 1996 and 1997, the suggestion of widespread child abuse networks with links to the highest levels of Belgian society took a firm hold in the Belgian public imagination, with newspapers reporting on key suspects being protected by politicians and members of the judiciary (e.g. Poot 1997: 1; Witte and Selleslagh 1996: 1; Beckers 1996b: 1), because of their supposed involvement in clandestine organizations. As is often the case with conspiratorial rhetoric, the descriptions of the extent, membership and location of the supposed networks were vague and allusive, and therefore open to suggestion rather than fact (Byford 2011: 72).

Given this conspiratorial rhetoric, the public debate surrounding the case also contained discourses with ramifications for precariously positioned minority groups, not in the least for gay men (Braembussche 2002: 51; Borghs 2015). Although Belgium had displayed political efforts throughout the 1980s and 1990s for LGBTIQI emancipation and public displays of homophobia

in the media were certainly frowned upon (Borghs 2015), both popular and academic sources have pointed to the deteriorating sociocultural climate for sexual diversity in the wake of the Dutroux affair (e.g. Braembussche 2002: 51; Borghs 2015; Dorsselaer 1997: 4). In the light of both the preceding public efforts to normalize homosexuality and the relatively early legalization of same-sex marriage in Belgium in 2003,³ this observation might seem rather anomalous. In this article, we engage this apparently contradictory historical situation by approaching the Dutroux affair and its mediatization as a moral panic (Cohen 2002), rather than a spontaneous democratic movement for transparency. This allows us to illustrate how the mediated articulation between homosexuality and child abuse relied on the continuity of discourses that already circulated in Belgian society, but also enables us to show how some dimensions of the concept of moral panic might need reevaluation.

To do so, we focus on the figure of the paedophile as a *folk devil*, considered a cornerstone of a moral panic (Cohen 2002: 38; Goode et al. 2010: 27–28). In this article, we argue that the folk devil, especially in the case of child abuse, should be approached as a floating signifier rather than a defined object with a stable meaning. In doing so, we illustrate how the ominous figure of the child abuser is represented as a symptom rather than a disease and is recuperated to formulate deeper sociocultural anxieties, such as unease with the increasing public emancipation and visibility of gay men. For this endeavour, we present a discourse analysis of four major Flemish newspapers with a temporal scope from 1 January 1997 to 30 April of the same year. Selected for our sample are two ‘quality’ newspapers (*De Morgen* and *De Standaard*) and two ‘popular’ outlets (*Het Laatste Nieuws* and *Het Nieuwsblad*).

The articles were collected for a larger project that researched the public debate on sexual diversity in late 1990s’ Flanders. This larger sample consisted of 167 pertinent articles, and were selected using LGBTQI-related keywords. One of the noteworthy trends found in the data was the appearance of keywords connected to homosexuality in articles related to child abuse, which led to this complementary study based on 44 relevant articles. Roughly constituting a fourth of the collected data, the significance of this particular portion of the data is further augmented by the fact that the archival research also included cultural and entertainment pages. When compared to the other actualities coverage displaying LGBTQI-related keywords – of which 37 examples were found – articles on both paedophilia and/or child abuse actually outweigh ‘regular’ LGBTQI-related content. In this article, we aim to qualitatively scrutinize the representational strategies informing these articulations.

By doing so, we first of all expose how the figure of Dutroux, and the paedophile in general, is a posteriori defined as a folk devil, creating the possibility of representing him as a symptom rather than the problem itself, hence becoming a floating signifier. To strengthen the argument of our broad discourse analysis, we furthermore present a high-profile case from the same time span in Flanders that poignantly visualizes the practice of connoting homosexuality to child abuse: that of Elio Di Rupo, then Belgian federal minister of economy and telecommunications. This case is especially illustrative of the negative connotation attributed to LGBTQIs at that time in Flanders, illustrating the pervasiveness of the contemporaneous articulation of homosexuality with paedophilia, and highlighting the stigma attached to gay men in the wake of the Dutroux affair.

3. The late 1990s in Belgium witnessed the introduction of cohabitation contracts, anti-discrimination laws regarding sexual identity, among other legislative attempts to emancipate the gay and lesbian community.

MORAL PANICS AND THE ROLE OF THE FOLK DEVIL

The theory of moral panic, formulated by Stanley Cohen (2002), has seen much productive use since its conception in the 1970s (e.g. Hall in Hall et al. [1978] 2013; Doezema 1999; Fox 2013). In its orthodox form, a moral panic consists of five interrelated dimensions. In their book *Moral Panics: the Social Construction of Deviance*, Goode et al. (2010) point first of all to the necessity of a concern over a certain group or behaviour – dubbed *folk devils* by Cohen (2002), generating hostility against this practice or its practitioners, consensus that the phenomenon should be counteracted, a disproportionate reaction to the phenomenon and the usually swift replacement of one moral panic with another highly mediatized narrative. On the one hand, this model offers a clearly constructed frame to analyse the social construction of deviance and the role of the media herein, but on the other it runs the risk to become a *passee partout*, wherein every phenomenon could be placed without contributing meaningful insight into the interrelationship between social problems, public opinion and the media (David et al. 2011: 222). Furthermore, authors such as Yvonne Jewkes (2015: 93) have pointed to the difficulties arising from the model, arguing that while the concept is valid and productive, its use should be reflected upon, as notions such as ‘moral’ and ‘disproportionate’ can easily give way to ambiguous and ideologically based interpretations. This theoretical hazard is further supplemented by the popular and even political recuperation of the term moral panic, rendering it a – in some cases – highly ideologically tainted concept (Jewkes 2015: 93–100).

As paedophilia is a much-cited phenomenon in the study of moral panics (e.g. Fox 2013; Jenkins 2004; Angelides 2005; Young 2004), the Dutroux affair presents us with an interesting case to critically evaluate several commonplace notions on the dimensions of moral panics. Hence, we approach the case as rightfully being a moral panic, displaying notable similarities to established cases of the phenomenon (e.g. the ones revolving around Satanic Ritual Abuse in the anglophone world and The Netherlands, see: e.g. Victor 1998; Young 2004; Jenkins and Maier-Katkin 1992; Beetstra 2004) while also demonstrating how certain commonplace assumptions on moral panics may be ill defined. The most pervasive of these assumptions is related to the first requirement for a moral panic: the folk devil and his activities. The folk devil is the main subject of the moral panic (Cohen 2002), and its existence and the dangers associated with it are widely proliferated by media. It adorns the front page, lends its name to the appealing headlines and through sizeable media coverage, gains a place in the public imagination. It is an easily identifiable figure positioned at the centre of the media-driven moral panic.

The term *folk devil*, however, also articulates a deceptive homogeneity and constructs the object of the moral panic as a clear-cut and well-defined demon who remains the sole point of focus for the duration of the panic. It is larger than life, and seems to act as the unchangeable and undividable centre of attention. Therefore, in many reflections on moral panics (e.g. Cohen 2002; Doezema 1999), the folk devil is argued to be carved in stone, to be a given whose definition has not only instigated, but continues to contain the same meaning during the lifespan of the panic. Although in superficial readings of moral panics, this assumption might seem to hold ground, its orthodox application facilitates a one-dimensional take on the ramifications of the moral panic and runs the risk of overlooking covert discourses at work during a moral panic.

The Dutroux affair illustrates how the folk devil – in this case the paedophile and people named peripherally in the case – is in fact a highly volatile object on which unrelated but similar social fears might be projected. The figure of Dutroux, his associates or the supposed network that he forms part of and the content of media coverage of their crimes demonstrate how the folk devil is no finished project, but a gilded frame adorning a blank canvas, on which a hegemonic ideology can be covertly disseminated. David Garland's (2008: 11) notion of a symptomatic element to moral panics constructs a similar argument, in the sense that a moral panic built up around a folk devil and the problems associated with this figure does not merely construct a final vilified object, but instead is invested in the recuperation of the phenomenon to point to a variety of perceived social issues. The folk devil is a distinct marker of undesirability, which can then be mobilized in processes of assigning meaning to other threats to the dominant social order. Hence, the folk devil is a symbol of deviance to which other phenomena can be articulated. In the case of the Dutroux affair, the crimes perpetrated provided commentators with a useful event to articulate broader sociocultural anxieties to, specifically, the ambivalence between 'visible' and 'invisible' homosexuality.

RECUPERATING THE PAEDOPHILE FOLK DEVIL

To date, Marc Dutroux remains one of Belgium's most iconic and notorious criminals. The electrician was apprehended in 1996 for the abduction and abuse of six young girls, of whom only two survived their captivity in his purpose-built secret basement. Even today, the name Dutroux is near to synonymous for the personification of evil for Belgians, to such an extent that numerous unrelated compatriots with the same surname legally changed their name (Anon. 1998). His apprehension instigated a surge of investigations into missing children, child pornography and prostitution of minors. Among the productive consequences hereof were the creation of Child Focus, an agency devoted to finding and bringing missing children to safety and – more importantly for this article – the apprehension of Patrick Derochette, another child rapist and murderer (Anon. 1997: 0). For months, both Dutroux and Derochette remained front-page news, and the aftermath of their arrests produced an unseen coverage on other cases related to paedophilia in the Flemish print media. Essentially, the two criminals instigated a moral panic, with the ominous paedophile as part of an even more sinister network as the folk devil.

The Belgian ominous male paedophile, however, is not such a homogeneous figure as he may seem. Ostensibly, he is defined by the crimes that he commits and the victims that he chooses. Hence, the paedophile folk devil is defined by his actions, and made visible by the discovery of his crimes. This is far from a sufficient aetiology, however, and only offers an *a posteriori* conceptualization of the infamous presence menacing society, but does not provide a set of characteristics that enable an *a priori* framework to detect the danger. The aetiology, or symptomatic permeation of the paedophile in Garland's (2008) terminology, does not rely on the *a posteriori* definition of the folk devil, but on his articulation with – among other elements – homosexuality.

In the case of Marc Dutroux, the articulation between child abuse and homosexuality was not tied in with his persona, but rather attributed to his

alleged network. Although some articles written in the years after the affair – after his divorce in prison, for example – mention that Dutroux at one point had an older gay roommate who paid him for sexual favours (e.g. Anon. 2004: 39), homosexuality is mainly touched upon in relation to Michel Nihoul in particular. Although Nihoul was never convicted of any offence related to the murders committed by Dutroux, his name and image was prominently featured in the Belgian print media and his background and whereabouts were broadly publicized (Dufrêne 1998: 102). The shady businessman from Brussels was a well-known figure in the nightlife of both the capital and Liège, and had the reputation of organizing and participating in upscale sex parties (Wils 1997: 4). This perceived promiscuity is the common denominator in contemporaneous articles on the man, and varies from references to his frequenting of bars with a lewd reputation to detailed depictions of his current and former relationships (e.g. Wils 1997: 4). Tied in with this motif of promiscuity, however, are constant references to homosexuality. Some articles mention his sporadic visits to gay bars and clubs in Liège (e.g. Anon. 1997c: 3), while others suggest a certain guilt by association by going into his gay acquaintances (e.g. Anon. 1997h: 7; Anon. 1997f: 5).

Where the association of homosexuality with paedophile crimes was covert and implicit in the case of Dutroux and Nihoul, the practice was often completely out in the open in the coverage on Patrick Derochette. Although his case resulted in discursive strategies already found with Nihoul earlier – mentioning alleged visits to gay bars, allusions to gay acquaintances or references to him frequenting the Fontaynas cruising area – some articles openly defined Derochette as a paedo-homosexual (e.g. Corremans 1997: 9; Anon. 1997d: 3; Anon. 1997f: 5), clearly constructing a perceived link between homosexuality and paedophilia. The figure of Derochette illustrates the role of the folk devil as a floating signifier, a screen on which broader socio-cultural anxieties may be projected, such as the ambivalent emancipation of homosexuality in late 1990s' Belgium. The inconceivability of the crimes committed by figures such as Derochette gives way to the possibility to vilify valid sexual identities and lifestyles by associating them with the character of the folk devil.

While Dutroux and Derochette are arguably the most emblematic cases in Flanders at that time, the coverage on other child-abuse related investigations continuously displays similar strategies of articulating homosexuality to the ominous molester. Less prominent affairs such as the discovery of child pornography, the elimination of young adult prostitution rings or paedophiles abroad were given the same speculative symptom-based treatment as the more infamous cases. Coverage on molesters abroad, for example, never fails to mention that the perpetrators either openly identified as gay or led a 'gay double life' (e.g. Anon. 1997i: 5; Anon. 1997m: 5). Items on child pornography display the same tendency, suggesting a natural link between desiring men and preying on children (e.g. Anon. 1997a: 5; Wils 1997: 4). Articles on adolescent prostitution again follow roughly the same lines: emphasis lies on 'gay customers' who 'take advantage' of troubled youngsters (e.g. Anon. 1997j: 3, 1997o: 4).

Hence, the paedophile-as-folk-devil as featured in the moral panic instigated by the Dutroux affair in late 1990s' Belgium functions as a floating signifier on which the sociocultural uneasiness with the increasing emancipation of sexual diversity could be projected. Simply defined by actions and results, rather than a proper aetiology, the figure of the paedophile was

recuperated by a homophobic discourse ideologically invested in the moral panic. This dynamic was further enforced by the surprising lack of coverage on paedophilia itself, which was supplanted with speculations on the whereabouts or acquaintances of people suspected in the respective cases. In a sense, an imaginary conceptual overlap was created between what was perceived as 'the gay milieu' and 'the paedophile milieu', constructed as two separate but neighbouring undergrounds that were perceived to facilitate crossovers. After all, while the 1990s witnessed an increasing emancipation of gay men, much of the gay scene was still a marginal phenomenon, known to be present yet still clouded to the public eye. This furthermore explains the schizophrenia in the Flemish press at the time. On the one hand, coverage explicitly thematizing topics related to homosexuality could hardly be called homophobic, and gay men were often given a voice in newspaper reporting (eg. especially so in the cultural and entertainment sections (eg. Anthonis 1997: 14; Six 1997a: 9, 1997b: 10; Vandenbroucke 1997: 28; Vullings 1997: 4; Jacobs 1997: 18; Vlaeminck 1997a: 7a, 1997b: 9). On the other, coverage on child abuse seemed to constantly propose links between child abuse and the gay milieu, leaving no chance unspent to vaguely refer to the 'gay friend' of a convicted paedophile.

Central to this schizophrenic ambivalence is the issue of public or private homosexuality, in the sense that the public debate seemed to construct the public disclosure of homosexuality, as was the case with writers, actors and musicians, as something praiseworthy and brave. Secretive, undisclosed homosexuality, however, carried with it images of sinister gatherings, of private collectives, easily associated with the motif of the network in the conspiratorial rhetoric that had been simmering for over a decade. This rather peculiar dichotomy between private and public homosexuality, and the role that individual agents play in contributing towards specific products of a moral panic, is especially apparent in the case of Elio Di Rupo.

ENTREPRENEURS OR OPPORTUNISTS?

Although the foregoing argumentation might suggest that the discursive practice of articulating homosexuality to child abuse was mostly confined to the mediatized public debate on the Dutroux affair, retaining little concrete ramifications, several cases point to the permeation of this homophobic attitude to the social climate for LGBTQIs in late 1990s' Flanders. Of these concrete examples of a deteriorating atmosphere for gay men, one particular case is paramount to touch upon in this article as it revolves around an explicit and unfounded inscription of paedophilia to Elio Di Rupo, then Belgian federal minister of economy and telecommunication. Furthermore, the case is essential in understanding how the moral panic instigated by the Dutroux affair differs from examples found in the anglophone world, wherein the concept of the *moral entrepreneur* occupies an important role as an explanatory model. Elaborated upon by Stanley Cohen (2002), the moral entrepreneur denotes individuals or groups of individuals with sufficient discursive power to put a perceived social threat on the public agenda (Robinson 2008: 114), contributing greatly to the genesis of a moral panic. In the case of panics related to child abuse and the articulation hereof to homosexuality especially, many authors have argued conservative religious advocacy groups or individuals to act as moral entrepreneurs (e.g. Jenkins 2004: 79, Angelides 2005/2009: 69,

Robinson 2008: 114). The prominence of moral entrepreneurs endows a moral panic with its discursive homogeneity. They dominate the way an issue is framed in the media and reduce the agency available to other voices. This is especially apparent in cases from the United States, where the public debate on child abuse was dominated by right-wing commentators with a predilection to insert a homophobic dimension into a readymade social concern (Jenkins 2004).

Analysing Flemish press coverage on the Dutroux affair, however, does not produce a moral entrepreneur as the instigator for the resulting moral panic. Newspaper articles reviewed earlier in this article suggest the articulation of homosexuality to child abuse to have been an organic dynamic rather than an orchestrated attempt to discredit sexual identities perceived as a threat to the dominant social order. Hence, identifiable moral entrepreneurs with an active commitment to vilify non-normative sexual identities were largely absent from the public debate. Although moral entrepreneurs did not claim a prominent place in the media coverage on the Dutroux affair, *moral opportunism* did play an important role in the public debate, most notably in the case of Elio Di Rupo.

At the time, francophone *Partie Socialiste* member Elio Di Rupo was the federal (i.e. Belgian) minister of economy and telecommunications and a closeted gay man. Although publicly discreet about his sexual identity, Di Rupo was an active member of the French-speaking gay community and a patron of gay clubs and events. This made his homosexuality known within the gay scene, and enabled Olivier Trusgnach, a gay teenager from Genk, to falsely accuse the minister of having had a sexual relationship with him when he was still a minor based on Di Rupo's sexual identity (Samson and Serafini 1997; Woestyne 2011). According to the youth's story, he and the prime minister had had several consensual sexual encounters when he was 17, but had also witnessed the minister having sex with boys younger than 16, a crime according to Belgian law (Vandebroek 1996a: 1–3; Donckier 1996: 1). As such, the charges against Di Rupo were based on a single witness, who alleged to a crime wherein he was neither perpetrator nor victim. Moreover, Trusgnach was later found to be a pathological liar, who presented himself as the vice consul of the Seychelles one day and as a prince of an ancient German dynasty on the other (Vandebroek 1996b: 1; Anon. 1997k: 3).

What is noteworthy about the coverage on the presumed criminal acts of the minister is the terminology used in the articles. While Di Rupo was in fact met with allegations of sexual relations with minors, coverage on the affair constantly employed the term 'paedophile' to describe the supposed criminal facts (e.g. Beckers 1996c: 1–2; Vandebroek 1996a: 1–3; Geudens 1996c: 1). Although the juridical veracity of this term could be subjected to a semantic discussion, a case could be made to argue that in the midst of a moral panic concerning child abuse, this is an extremely tendentious denotation. By framing the affair with the – by then already notorious – term paedophilia, contemporaneous Flemish print media suggested a false dimension of abuse and even rape, constructing clear links between Di Rupo's rumoured homosexuality and the figure of the ominous child molester. This terminology then gave way to even more outrageous articulations as the minister was subsequently even suggested to be connected to Dutroux by some articles (e.g. Geudens 1996a: 2; Donckier 1996: 1). Furthermore, Flemish newspapers perpetually constructed an image of the private gay community as consisting of victimized underage boys preyed

upon by older men (Muynck 1996: 0; Donckier 1996: 1; Anon. 1997j: 3, 1997o: 4). The pervasiveness of this representational strategy based on the articulation of homosexuality with secretive communities is also illustrated by the tendency in Flemish print media to make allusions to Di Ruvo's supposed involvement in the 'paedophilia scene' even after the minister had been fully exonerated in the affair (e.g. Anon. 1997k: 3; Kelen 1997: 3; Anon. 1997e: 2).

As the controversy built up around the minister was ultimately proven to be a power move on behalf of Di Ruvo's political opponents who had handily employed the overblown and unfounded affair to discredit a popular rival (Coenen et al. 2004), the exertion of discursive power should in this case be seen as moral opportunism rather than entrepreneurship. Our analysis shows that those with sufficient discursive power to occupy the position of the moral entrepreneur in the Dutroux affair were not the actual instigators of the homophobic tendencies in the public debate. Rather, they recuperated existing representational strategies based on the articulation between the 'homosexual underground' and child abuse for political gain. For Di Ruvo however, the entire media storm did constitute a serious defamation. Moreover, the minister found himself forced to disclose his homosexuality publicly, hence becoming the first openly gay politician in Belgium. What is especially noteworthy about this, though, is the fact that after his sexual identity became public, his image became detached from the 'homosexual underground' constructed around imaginaries of seedy bars and secret dates, powerfully diminishing the potential to articulate Di Ruvo to child abuse. Because of the public disclosure of his homosexuality, the minister moved over from one side of the schizophrenically ambivalent attitude towards gayness to the other and Trusgnach was increasingly constructed as a pathological liar.

An interview in *De Standaard* on 19 February 1997 with Christophe Bauwens – then coordinator of *De Holebifoon* (a support-line for Flemish LGBTQIs, *holebi* being the Dutch equivalent of the acronym 'LGBTQI') – illustrates the same constructed division between public and private homosexuality. In the article, he states that the societal panic instigated by the Dutroux-affair clearly influenced on the one hand how LGBTQIs were perceived by mainstream society and instigated a certain degree of discretion and self-censorship in LGBTQIs on the other. He specifically referred to the role of news media herein, stating that the homosexual community was quite often equated or at the very least associated with paedophilia in popular reporting on criminal vice cases that involved children, while also stating that this did not entail a reversal of the community's emancipation (Dorsselaer 1997: 4). Here again, a publicly avowed gay man, stripped from all references to 'the gay underground' is given a voice in a newspaper that days before – and after – the interview, engaged in the practice he pointed to.

The moral opportunism in the case of Elio Di Ruvo, then, was only possible because of this ambivalence on homosexuality, which constructed a clear conceptual division between 'honest' – confessed – public gayness and 'suspect' homosexuality situated in a perceived 'underground circuit'. Avowedly, homosexuality was an increasingly accepted phenomenon, and many articles are illustrative of the taboo imposed on explicit homophobic public discourses (e.g. Anon. 1997b: 1, 1997g: 7, 1997n: 3). Clearly, however, this benevolence only extended insofar 'otherness' was confessed, was brought into the open and disassociated from the popular image of 'the gay underground'.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

However heterogeneous and fleeting, the *White March* should be understood as a bottom-up popular construction of 'the people', characterized by transparency and symbolized by the colour white, opposed to an amalgam of perceived wrongs organized around the lack of transparency or benevolence (Lippens 1998: 50; Brabant 1998: 411). It is therefore hardly surprising that this dynamic, with its noted lack of ideological focus, carried within it particular ramifications for particular groups. While similar arguments might be formulated about possible other marginalized groups in Belgium at the time, the specific historical contingency of the gay male community in late 1990s' Belgium clearly offered a framework that facilitated the articulation of homosexuality with child abuse while at the same time conforming to the ostensibly homo-positive discourse in the public debate.

The schizophrenic ambivalence displayed by the Flemish written press in the late 1990s on homosexuality proves to be the product of a mutually productive relationship between the lack of a clearly defined folk devil in the moral panic ignited by the Dutroux affair and the intermediary stage wherein the gay community found itself. Journalists seemed enticed to link the increasingly familiar image of 'private' secretive gayness, centred around informal cruising areas, gay subcultures and gay clubs, to the familiar imagination of the perceived flaws of the Belgian state, based on similar constructions of nightly gatherings, debauched networks and sex clubs. As such, the folk devil was a central element to this dynamic. Its highly recognizable and symbolic role combined with the lack of homogeneous signification renders it a signifier constantly 'ripe for the taking', ready to be recuperated to be presented as a symptom for perceived social threats.

By refraining from offering an aetiology of the crimes and instead featuring countless subtle and implicit allusions to either the familiarity of the culprits in the gay milieu, their previous visits to cruising areas or gay bars or even simply to gay acquaintances, homosexuality and sexual diversity were constructed forming an integral part of the associative and network-based identity of the folk devil. Hereby, the case of Elio Di Rupo stands as a prime example of the concrete and material ramifications that this had for gay men in late 1990s' Belgium. The schizophrenic ambivalence observed in the Flemish press in the late 1990s furthermore sheds light on the peculiarity of the Belgian moral panic: the absence of clear-cut moral entrepreneurs. Given the fact that explicit homophobia was strongly condemned, and ever stronger calls were formulated to criminalize the discrimination of gay men and lesbian women, those agents out to propagate a decidedly homophobic agenda could not gain momentum in the mainstream press. Therefore, moral entrepreneurs remained largely absent from the public debate and explicit articulatory strategies by, for example, right-wing politicians were openly chastized (e.g. Anon. 1997n: 7).

While it might be easy, and indeed even comforting, to observe this dynamic in late 1990s' Belgium from a contemporary perspective, and to deem it an occurrence of the past, as something we have now left behind us, we need to stress the fact that similar mechanisms surface to this day. Although the situation for gay men in contemporary Belgium has definitely improved since the timeframe of our case study (see: Borghs 2015), other groups, such as Muslims or even BDSM practitioners, continue to be framed in similar ways. Our case first and foremost illustrates how a supposedly

'pure' call for transparency such as the *White March* carries within it the potential to marginalize and even vilify precariously positioned minority groups, and how a seemingly noble cause should not be allowed to dissemble stigmatizing rhetoric. It is in understanding how these historical discourses functioned that we produce the necessary tools to resist contemporary discourses combining emancipatory rhetoric with strategies of intolerance.

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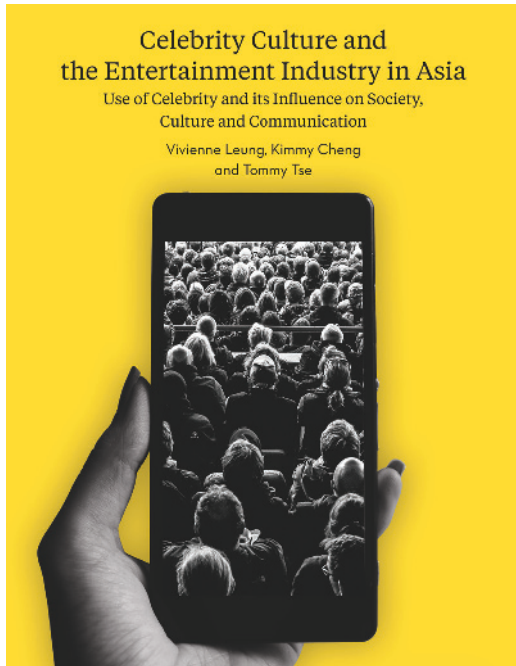
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Celebrity Culture and the Entertainment Industry in Asia

Use of Celebrity and its Influence on Society, Culture and Communication
By Vivienne Leung, Kimmy Cheng and Tommy Tse



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Offering rare insight into the world of celebrity and media in China and beyond, *Celebrity Culture and the Entertainment Industry in Asia* looks closely at the dynamics of stardom and celebrity endorsement in the region and examines its impact on marketing and media. Through first-hand interviews with celebrities and entertainment industry practitioners, the authors discuss the social, cultural and economic influences of celebrity. Dialogues with celebrities such as Kwok-Leung Kam, Bob Lam, Denise Ho, Hilary Tsui and Francis Mak provide insider accounts of celebrity formation, management and marketing in Hong Kong and Mainland China, as well as South Korea and Taiwan.



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The voices of journalism and the LGBTQI movement in response to violence in same-sex couples: Towards the construction of a social problem?

ABSTRACT

In recent years the Spanish media have highlighted numerous homicides of gay men committed by their partners or ex-partners. These homicides are classified by the term intragender violence, or violence committed in the context of a relationship between people of the same sex. Reports of these crimes have led to public debate on how society and its institutions should respond to these homicides, which several commentators have likened to partner violence against women (PVAW), the victims of which receive legal protection from government institutions. In this article we analyse the discourse that is used to refer to this issue by the two main agents involved in the construction of collective problems – social organizations and the media. By examining analytical journalistic documents (reports and opinion articles), we analyse the approaches of the LGBTQI associations cited in those documents and media discourse

KEYWORDS

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social problem
journalistic discourse

to identify and reconstruct the arguments used and establish similarities and differences between the stakeholders in the organizational and media spheres. Our results show that while associations and journalistic stakeholders agree that violence in same-sex couples should be considered a social problem, they disagree as to whether or not such violence should be categorized as male-based violence, similar to PVAW.

INTRODUCTION

Reports on gay men being murdered by their partners or former partners have entered the mainstream news agenda. These homicides are classified by the term *intragender violence*, or violence committed in the context of a relationship between people of the same sex. In this article we determine the extent to which the main stakeholders in the construction of social problems (organizations and the media) have used cases of intragender violence in news reports to promote a collective consideration of this form of violence as a social problem, i.e. to assert that violence committed in the context of gay couples should be treated as a cause for concern for politicians and society rather than as a private issue. To do so we analyse the discourses employed by social organizations and the main media outlets to discuss this type of violence in order to determine whether they urge intragender violence to be considered as a social problem. Some of these voices claim that the violence committed against gay men by their (ex)partners in Spain should receive a similar consideration as *violencia de género* or 'partner violence against women' (hence PVAW), a violent demonstration of *machismo* as defined in legal terms in Spain since 2004. Indeed, for the last decade, PVAW and *violencia machista* (male-based violence) have been considered by the Spanish government, justice and media discourses as a problem of a public nature rather than a private affair (Comas-d'Argemir 2015). We will also discuss the socio-political implications and the gender perceptions inferred by these approaches in order to compare the different interpretations made by these organizations and media.

PROBLEMATIZATION OF REALITY: BETWEEN JOURNALISM AND SOCIAL AGENTS

Social problems, with which we identify aspects of society that are viewed with concern by the community, are not conceptualized spontaneously but result from a process of signification and construction that enables certain experiences and circumstances to be problematized, and demands that these experiences and circumstances be continuously re-examined so that they can be acted upon. For this reason it is often pointed out – for example by those who support the notion of symbolic interaction (Blumer 1971; Hilgartner and Bosk 1988) – that more important than the existence of the problem is the fact that the problem should be defined and labelled as such. Various stakeholders may be involved in this process, including social groups and entities on the one hand and the media on the other. Any stakeholder can function as a claim-maker or policy entrepreneur, terms used by some social researchers to refer to stakeholders who attempt to construct a social problem for public consumption in order to promote debate, gain support for their cause, and influence the agenda of those who make decisions in the various spheres of community life (Spector and Kitsuse 1977; Best 1987; Johnson-Cartee 2005).

One of the main objectives of social organizations is to wage the symbolic struggle involved in the construction of specific meanings (Gamson 1988). In this context, group stakeholders are the main claim-makers since they are supposed to have vast knowledge of the subject and be experts in the field. The first thing they always try to do, therefore, is indicate what exactly the social problem is that should be analysed. This is the main action in their communications effort, the aim of which is to disseminate a message that enables individuals to be activated and support to be generated for their demands: 'a *claim about reality* that is, *at the time of its assertion*, defined as improper, implausible, immoral, false, threatening, corrupting, seditious, treasonous, blasphemous, degenerate, despicable – or in some other manner not respectable or otherwise meriting serious consideration' (Lofland 1996: 3, original emphasis).

Constructing this definition does not appear to be so difficult. What is much more difficult is incorporating this message into the public sphere, and it is even more difficult to succeed in making this message the dominant one (McAdam 1996). One of the main obstacles social movements must overcome as part of this process is gaining access to the required and desired space that is controlled by the mass media because, as Gitlin pointed out (1980), the media sometimes generate – and sometimes extend – a legitimate field of discourse that gives shape to the general public's definitions regarding their situations.

Journalism, on the other hand, is a key instrument not only for making certain realities visible but also for promoting the perception of a particular area of our existence as a social problem. Journalistic discourse has long been the public discourse par excellence and is therefore sought after by social organizations. As Hilgartner and Bosk (1988) asserted, a social problem is a certain condition or situation that at least some stakeholders label as a problem in the fields of public discourse and action, defining it as harmful and contextualizing it in certain ways. The media arena thus becomes the environment where different proposals for defining and problematizing reality compete with each other.

Journalists have the capacity to promote this interpretation of facts or phenomena by contextualizing them (Wondemaghen 2014), attracting the public's attention to certain elements, and shaping the way the public perceives the nature of the problem. They achieve this both directly through their opinion pieces and indirectly by how they present the opinions of the main claim-makers, i.e. how they select them and emphasize them. Media coverage often works, therefore, as secondary claims-making (Best 1990) since citizens' concerns with regard to social problems are more likely to be the product of media consumption than of the direct impact of the discourse used by the main promoters of these demands, such as social groups.

The process by which the demands of a particular organization compete with those of other social agents – who also want to promote potential problems to gain public attention and social resources – is highly selective (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988). Social organizations therefore share a responsibility with the mass media to construct and respond to the challenges faced by a particular community. Media stakeholders are consequently members of the set of institutions and groups that act as constructors of social problems and promoters of certain causes (Neveu 1999) and with which social organizations compete to construct reality.

However, social problems do not appear naturally or instantaneously. Several researchers have identified the various stages through which an issue passes as it evolves from being unknown or ignored by the public, to becoming central in public debate and key in the political agenda before disappearing from the collective sphere again. The media and stakeholders groups play an important role in all of these stages. Downs (1972) describes five phases to represent the cycle of attention paid to public problems: (1) the pre-problem (the media show a certain indifference to the issue and prefer a sensationalist or moral approach when confronting it); (2) the alarming discovery of the problem and euphoric enthusiasm (journalistic coverage increases substantially and the issue is perceived as a threat); (3) awareness of the costs that will be incurred in dealing with the issue (the media promote discussion about the resources and measures that should be implemented to tackle the problem); (4) a gradual decline in the intensity of public interest; and (5) the post-problem phase.

An analysis that corresponds even more closely to the issues we address in this article is provided by Spector and Kitsuse (1973), who identified four phases of how a problem is configured: (1) a group denounces the existence of certain circumstances, describing them as harmful, offensive and undesirable. This generates controversy and creates a public and political issue around the problem; (2) the group is recognized as legitimate by an official institution, thus enabling it to conduct an official investigation into the problem, make proposals to combat the problem, and create a body to solve it; (3) unhappy with the response to the problem and the bureaucracy involved, the group once again denounces the problem and makes further demands; and (4) the group reacts, rejecting the response to its demands provided by the administration and promoting the development of activities to construct an alternative.

Fagoaga's proposal (1994), on the other hand, places the emphasis on media action. According to the author, there are two different processes. The first – the legitimization process – is characterized by the media granting newsworthiness to certain events because they match news values and have been reported by informative sources with sufficient authority. The second – routinization – is a consequence of the first. During this stage, the events implying the existence of a certain social problem are incorporated into the media agenda, where they occupy a regular space and are assigned media staff to cover them. These phases are preceded by a determination process in which social movements attempt to create new meaningful practices around certain realities in order to disambiguate those experiences.

These theoretically described processes have been implemented in practice, for example, in studies into how PVAW ceased to be a private matter and became a social problem, deserving the attention of political agents and the wider community. In this article we focus on violence within same-sex couples, which some experts term intragender violence, in order to determine whether the discourses of the media and the LGBTQI community seek to construct this form of violence as a social problem.

MEN MURDERED BY THEIR MALE PARTNERS OR EX-PARTNERS: WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

The progressive normalization of gay couples in Spanish society, accompanied by institutional and legal support for many of their demands, has been achieved in parallel with their increasing presence in the media, both in fiction

and current affairs news reporting (Aliaga and Cortés 2000). Moreover, gay couples are now represented in the media with greater dignity and accuracy since many of the resources that were traditionally used to portray them, such as prejudices, euphemisms and stereotypes, have been abandoned (Carratalá 2011). However, addressing certain areas of these realities for the first time can be challenging for information professionals since doing so involves discussing aspects that until recently had been out of the public's view. The violence committed in gay relationships is a good example. If homosexual relationships were long concealed as special and intimate friendships, any aggression that may have taken place within those relationships fell victim to silence. Now that these relationships, some of which are institutionalized through marriage, are habitually represented openly in journalistic discourse, the most painful circumstances affecting them also become noteworthy events.

However, the media appear not to work with a common framework to approach this type of incidents. One study that focused on Spanish press coverage of cases of intragender violence (Carratalá 2016) showed that the information published on this phenomenon highlights the differences in the way this form of violence is interpreted by journalists, which in turn affects how such crimes are narrated in the news. That study analysed news articles on the murders of four men by their male partners or former partners between 2010 and 2014. The analysis showed that the treatment received by this form of violence is generally very similar to the treatment that was received by cases of violence against women before the 1990s, i.e. when partner femicides had not yet become a social problem and were still considered private matters. In this sense, the information that is presented on intragender violence displays an episodic approach similar to accident and crime reports, as is evidenced by the sources used (those close to the victim, the police, etc.), the images shown (the victim's face, the removal of the body, the crime scene, etc.), sensationalist aspects (lurid descriptions, shocking circumstances, crime graphics, etc.), and victim blaming. The discursive formulas employed also support this conclusion, since one common strategy used by the journalists was to present the events as 'crimes of passion' (18 per cent).

However, the study identified other categorizations for these homicides, such as 'domestic violence' (18%), 'gender violence' (9%), 'intimate partner violence' (6%) and 'intrafamily violence' (3%). These examples indicate that there is an incipient attempt of some information professionals to frame such incidents as examples of a specific type of violence. This implies treating these incidents as a similar social problem to PVAW, the coverage of which includes decalogues, writing rules and style guidelines that are shared by the majority of journalistic practices in Spain for the last years (Comas-d'Argemir 2015).

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Beginning with this incipient interest of some media reports in presenting intragender violence as a social problem, in this article we investigate the role the media have developed in this area and compare this role with the efforts made in the same field by social organizations. Our main objectives are to evaluate the discursive approaches to the demands – made by the media on the one hand, and social organizations on the other – that the violence committed in gay couples be considered a social problem, and to determine their points of coincidence and divergence.

The study is based on the hypothesis that since the organizations linked to the LGBTQI movement are more engaged than media stakeholders in actions of mobilization and protest, their discourses will be more coherent and stronger in their demands for intragender violence to be considered a social problem to which resources should be assigned by the government and institutions.

To conduct this research, we compiled reports and opinion articles published by several Spanish-language media sources between 2011 and 2016 that addressed, considered and investigated this phenomenon. These texts enabled us to access the discourse articulated by LGBTQI groups on this issue since their opinions are reflected in six of the units of analysis. From the mode of discourse employed in the reports and the arguments expressed in the opinion articles, we were able to determine where the media stands on this issue. The nine units of analysis are shown in Table 1.

| Date | Media outlet | Type of article | Title/author | Organizations cited |
|------------------|--|-----------------|--|----------------------------|
| 28 July 2011 | <i>La Razón</i> | Column | This is also domestic violence / Cecilia García | – |
| 20 November 2014 | Eldiario.es | Report | Male-based violence or domestic violence? / Patricia Burgo Muñoz | COLEGAS FELGTB |
| 21 November 2014 | <i>El Correo</i> | Editorial | A different domestic violence | – |
| 22 November 2014 | <i>El Correo</i> | Report | Violence does not distinguish between gay couples and heterosexual couples / Jorge Barbó | ALDARTE COLEGAS |
| 26 November 2014 | <i>El Mundo</i> | Report | Is gay violence male-based violence? / David Vigarío i Rafael J. Álvarez | FELGTB COLEGAS |
| 28 November 2014 | <i>El Mundo</i> | Report | Violence without distinctions / Cristina Luis | COGAM |
| 28 November 2014 | Rtve.es | Report | The invisibility of violence within gay and lesbian couples, who demand greater protection and more resources / María Menéndez | COLEGAS COGAM FELGTB |
| 22 December 2014 | <i>Interviú</i> | Report | Abuse comes out of the closet / Inma Muro | FELGTB ALDARTE |
| 15 February 2016 | Sinetiquetas.org (digital LGBTQI medium for Latin America) | Report | Male-based violence also knocks on the doors of LGBTQI homes / Deysi Ramos | – |

Table 1: Reports (n=7) and opinion articles (n=2) analysed.

ACTIVIST NARRATIVE: WHAT SHOULD BE THE RESPONSE TO THIS REALITY?

We can determine the discourse constructed on the issue of intragender violence by the main social organizations that are working to defend the rights of the LGBTQI community from the way it is included in the media. The study mentioned earlier (Carratalá 2016) showed that these organizations were not usually considered as information sources when the media covered specific cases of violence in homosexual couples – the main sources were the police, relatives and the close environment. However, they became included in the media narrative when these reports changed from providing information about a particular episode to taking a more general approach to the phenomenon, usually by means of the interpretative genre *par excellence*, i.e. the journalistic report. In fact, leading Spanish LGBTQI organizations were cited in six of the seven reports that we compiled for this study (see Table 1).

Careful reading of these articles shows that the groups linked to the LGBTQI community are divided into two broad categories: those who believe that intragender violence should be addressed by public administration as a manifestation identical to PVAW, and those who argue in favour of a different reality that requires different measures. Below we discuss both of these positions in order to better explain this contrast.

The first group comprises COLEGAS and ALDARTE. COLEGAS (a confederation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender groups) has ensured that the media reflect their position on this issue, i.e. an urgent amendment of Organic Law 1/2004, of 28 December, on comprehensive protection measures against gender violence should be implemented to include LGBTQI couples. According to their media statements issued in 2014, COLEGAS has called for this equivalent status for years because same-sex couples are unprotected, 'unlike others, for which support is available and special types of criminal offences exist' (Vigario and Álvarez 2014). Paco Martínez, the president of the association at that time, asked: 'If in 2005 our marriages were considered first-class, then why do we suffer second-class domestic violence?' before adding 'violence and hatred cannot have different answers depending on the victim's sexual orientation' (Menéndez 2014). According to COLEGAS, amending the 2004 Organic Law to include gay couples would be justified because a gender aspect to this violence exists, since it is necessary to take into account not only the matter of biological sex but also certain 'cultural gender constructions' (Menéndez 2014).

The Basque association ALDARTE (gay, lesbian and transsexual care centre) has a similar approach. According to this association, there is no need for a specific law but for amendments to the 2004 ruling 'to defend real equality between couples made up of two women or two men on the one hand, and heterosexual couples on the other' (Barbó 2014). It also demands that the Spanish Ministry for Home Affairs should set up an internal body to count each case of intragender violence that occurs. According to a statement issued in 2014 by Elena Olaortua, ALDARTE's lawyer, 'despite certain specificities, this type of abuse is no different from that endured by women' (Muro 2014: 33).

Associations belonging to the second group, i.e. those that consider intragender violence to be different from PVAW, include FELGTB (national lesbian, gay, transsexual and bisexual federation) and COGAM (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual collective of Madrid). Both of these associations share the

same diagnosis (the non-visibility of this type of violence) and agree on the treatment required (a specific law) to address this problem. They also agree that the differences between intragender violence and PVAW 'are clear' (Menéndez 2014), that the problem should be analysed and combated with the same consensus as with PVAW, and that those affected should be provided with adequate care and protection.

In 2014 Boti García, president of FELGTB, asserted that in homosexual couples one gender does not dominate over another and that 'ours is a different type of violence that some have called intragender violence. Or better, domestic violence' (Vigario and Álvarez 2014). In her opinion, same-sex couples have some specific characteristics, but these are not based on gender inequality. In response to the associations that believe that violence within gay couples and PVAW are two realities with several aspects in common, García explained that including the violence endured in a homosexual relationship within male-based violence obscures the two types: 'It dilutes partner violence against women, while removing identity from ours. If all is male-based violence, nothing is male-based violence' (Vigario and Álvarez 2014). In the opinion of the FELGTB president, it therefore makes no sense to include cases of violence in gay couples in the 2004 Organic Law. In an interview with *Interviú* magazine, García explained: 'We do not fit into that Law because it is based on a situation of inequality between men and women that does not arise in our relationships. It would be a mistake to put us all in the same boat' (Muro 2014: 33).

Esperanza Montero, the president of COGAM, expressed herself in similar terms in the articles contained in our corpus. In her opinion, 'intragender violence exists and requires specific resources that currently [2014] do not exist' (Luis 2014), which is why her association demanded the enactment of a different law. Montero argued that, despite the similar characteristics, the two types of violence must be differentiated.

As we can see, all the main groups linked to the LGBTQI community, or at least those that have succeeded in getting their voices heard in the public narrative, share the view that violence within gay couples is a social problem that requires political leaders to take action. However, there is disagreement about whether or not it is appropriate to equate intragender violence with PVAW, so the difference of opinion arises in the formulation of this action.

MEDIA NARRATIVE: IS INTRAGENDER VIOLENCE A SOCIAL PROBLEM?

We looked into whether journalistic discourse frames intragender violence as a social problem, if media sources challenge the authorities to respond to this phenomenon, and if they equate intragender violence with PVAW. As we mentioned earlier, Carratalá (2016) analysed how the Spanish press covered four cases of intragender violence. Some of the eleven variables analysed, such as the sources and the thematic setting, had been indicated in previous studies on the journalistic treatment of PVAW as being essential factors in the media construction of social problems (Berganza 2003; Marín et al. 2011; Vives-Cases et al. 2005).

As we mentioned earlier, the most frequent sources were from the immediate environment of those involved, while official or institutional sources and experts in the field hardly appeared at all. This makes it difficult to present

the phenomenon as a social problem. Moreover, none of the reports quoted LGBTQI organizations as sources of information.

Since the crimes in the reports were linked to other violent episodes and therefore not treated as special cases with possible further implications, their thematic setting was only specified in a few cases that related the crime in the report to earlier homicides (12 per cent). Significantly, the thematic settings of some of the reports that did attempt to go beyond the episodic character of the events, framed these in the general discourse of male-based violence, in which the homicides committed in the context of gay relationships were added to the list of femicides that had been committed in the previous months, equating intragender violence with PVAW.

In the present study, however, we do not examine daily news narratives of specific cases of intragender violence. Instead we focus on the journalistic articles listed in Table 1, which were published to discuss and examine this type of violence, since this kind of discourse (reports and opinion articles detached from the hurried practice of daily news coverage) best illustrates the media's perspective on the social implications of this type of violence and what the response of the institutions should be. First, we address the media's interpretative discourse by examining the reports and then explore the arguments expressed in their opinion articles in order to evaluate which theses they defend.

With regards to the seven reports we compiled for this study – the publication of which clearly indicates that the media have a certain interest in recognizing this violence as a social problem – we believe it is important to focus on two issues: the explicit appeals expressed in the writers' opinions, and the inclusion of experts in the field who help to interpret the phenomenon.

In these reports we often find fragments of narrative that illustrate the journalists' position on the need for public authorities to do something to combat this phenomenon, and on the controversy over whether this type of violence can be equated with PVAW in the Spanish context (Comas-d'Argemir 2015).

The analysed reports commonly emphasize the lack of protection endured by victims of violence in same-sex relationships. According to the articles' authors, these victims are doubly vulnerable as gays and lesbians who suffer violence by their partners or former partners are not registered in any administrative records and have no legal document to protect them.

The fact that no official figures exist for the number of cases – having these would help to determine the extent of the phenomenon and therefore the invisibility associated with such crimes – is one criticism expressed in the reports. For example, the *El Correo* article (Barbó 2014) states that 'in Spain there are no official statistics that would bring to light a social scourge that does not even have a legally accepted term like PVAW' and 'while there are no figures to prove that the Koldo case is not an isolated incident, deaths accumulate in the closet of violence'. And there are more examples: the report published in *El Mundo* (Luis 2014) stresses that, given the absence of official data, the scope of the problem is probably greater than people think: 'we should not err in the simplicity of thinking that these are isolated, rare incidents'. Similarly, *Interviú* magazine (Muro 2014: 30, 32) mentions invisibility and obscurity as two reasons why this violence is not met with a suitable social response: 'These examples illustrate the invisibility and vulnerability that affect intragender violence' and 'homosexuals are the forgotten victims [...]'. Though in much smaller numbers, the reality is that lives are lost and tyranny is endured'.

Also expressed by the writers of these reports is the demand for a legal instrument similar to the regulations that have fought against PVAW since 2004. Eldiario.es (Burgo Muñoz 2014) states that 'the Law against partner gender violence against women, which has been in force since 2004, protects female victims of the violence committed by their partners, but no legal instrument exists to protect homosexual partners'. Similarly, the report published on the RTVE.es website (Menéndez 2014) discusses the negative consequences of not being included in the current legislative framework for the victims of violence between same-sex partners: 'this type of violence is considered to be domestic violence or intragender violence but its victims are not able to benefit from the welfare resources established by the comprehensive law on partner violence against women'. Along similar lines, the author of one of the two reports published in *El Mundo* (Luis 2014) stresses the importance of working to enact legal regulations that would ensure greater protection against these crimes: '[...] a fundamental request to not only bring about a change in the prosecution of the perpetrators but also a change in the rights of the victims'.

Supporting the implementation of legislation similar to the 2004 PVAW Law involves equating both types of violence. Indeed, this is expressed explicitly by the journalists themselves in the reports analysed for this study. Statements that directly equate PVAW with the violence committed in the context of homosexual relationships appear in reports published in *El Correo* (Barbó 2014): 'abuse does not occur only between men and women'; *Interviú* (Muro 2014: 34): 'though the law views them differently, their stories have a background and manner that victims of partner violence against women will recognize as identical'; and in the Latin American Sinetiquetas.org (Ramos 2016): [LGBTQI couples] are not exempt from this type of toxicity' (referring to gender violence).

This equivalence detected in the journalistic discourse appears to be based on the suffering caused by both types of aggression. In the opinion of journalists who explain what intragender violence is and what it involves, the situation created by this form of violence is no different from that created by PVAW. The author of the *El Correo* report (Barbó 2014), for example, states that, apart from the gender of those involved, what lies behind the crime does not make it any different from PVAW: 'another image, the same in content but diametrically different in form. [...] the same drama, only the victim is different'. A similar approach is taken by the author of the *El Mundo* report (Luis 2014): 'the beating hurts the same, the only difference is that Juan hits Manuel instead of Maria. The beatings are endured just as in heterosexual relationships'. In other cases, for example in the *Interviú* article (Muro 2014: 34), this equivalence seems to result from the journalist's knowledge of both social realities. In this way the author takes on the authority needed to establish a clear similarity between the two types of violence:

regardless of their sexual condition, the narrative of the victims, whether male or female, is similar, despite the fact that the law does not consider that male-based violence (*violencia machista*) can occur between two men and addresses the matter as a fight between equals.

A final key to understanding the type of framework favoured by the media, as illustrated by these interpretive articles, is determined by the experts

cited as sources of information. These experts belong to different specializations and express different views on how to address the events. Given the nature of the phenomenon, it is not surprising that the most prominent voices in these reports come from the disciplines of law, psychology and sociology.

In three of the seven reports, the journalists found legal sources and sometimes included different points of view from those that generally predominate in such articles. The Eldiario.es article (Burgo Muñoz 2014), for example, states that 'lawyers who are experts in PVAW' – without identifying them – 'argue that the law [of 2004] is well crafted [...] and that cases of abuse by women against men or between same-sex partners are merely testimonial'. On other occasions, the legal sources agreed that the victims of intragender violence should be given greater protection because their situation is one of inequality compared to victims of PVAW. For example, María José Bodi, a lawyer quoted in *Interviú* (Muro 2014: 34), asserted that 'in cases of intragender violence, sentences are less severe because the crime is treated as one of domestic violence rather than one of male-based violence'. Similarly, the opinion of magistrate Francisco Javier Pérez-Olleros was included in the report published by Rte.es (Menéndez 2014): 'the fact that gays and lesbians who have been abused are less protected [...] is very unfair'.

As we mentioned earlier, other sources cited are from the disciplines of psychology and sociology. Though these experts do not openly demand the enactment of legal instruments to combat intragender violence, they do provide key insights in other ways. Their inclusion in these reports is justified as an attempt to further equate PVAW with the violence that occurs in gay and lesbian relationships. For example, the *El Correo* report (Barbó 2014) contains the opinions of two experts who reinforce this equivalence. Psychologist and sociologist Mujika Flores denounces the fact that '[the law] forgets that abuse and violence in sexual-affective relationships is not a reality solely of heterosexual relationships' and that 'in families and couples made up of two men or two women real situations of physical and psychological violence occur'. Sexologist Lourdes Bravo, for her part, states that 'the result [of intragender violence] is the same [as that of PVAW], the only difference is that in these cases imbalance due to gender does not exist'.

Experts from these fields are quoted in these articles in order to explain why violence occurs in same-sex relationships. For example, in the report published on Sinetiquetas.org (Ramos 2016), we read that, in the opinion of psychologist Hisvet Fernández, in the case of relationships between two men male-based partner violence occurs when one of the homosexual partners takes on the 'male' role and 'seeks the accommodation of a heterosexual relationship'.

Some experts also discuss the need for resources and support for the victims of these crimes. According to sexologist Lourdes Bravo, who is also cited in the article that appeared in *Interviú* (Muro 2014: 32), 'there are hundreds of victims of violent relationships with same-sex partners that remain hidden and lack resources to help them escape their situation'. In one of the *El Mundo* articles (Luis 2014), psychologist Isabel González Sáez emphasizes that there is still a long way to go and that 'help is needed and greater attention is required from foundations, associations and administrations because you often encounter a legal void when you have to refer somebody and you can't'.

In general, the vast majority of experts who add their voices to the journalistic discourse on intragender violence believe that little attention is paid to

this issue in public debate and appeal for more. A good example of this is this statement from Bravo: 'Some believe that there is no need to legislate on this matter. It could be argued that intragender violence is not a social problem, but one victim is one too many' (Muro 2014: 33).

Having completed our analysis of the journalistic reports contained in our sample, we now analyse the extent to which the two opinion articles in the corpus also examined and reflected on male-based violence. One article appeared in a column in *La Razón* by Cecilia García entitled 'This is domestic violence too' (García 2011) and the other appeared in an *El Correo* editorial entitled 'A different domestic violence' (Anon. 2014). As we can see, these headlines are quite significant. Both texts are presented under a thesis that seems to support the equivalence of violence committed in same-sex relationships with the violence heterosexual women often suffer from their partners or former partners.

What we deduce from the title of the *El Correo* editorial is confirmed on reading it. The newspaper uses the article to lend its institutional voice to equating PVAW with intragender violence, at least with regard to the suffering that both types of violence inflict on their victims. We observe how the editorial demands that the special protection granted to women by the Organic Law of 2004 should not 'neglect or devalue other cases of abuse and violence that, though in the minority, are no less destructive for their victims'. It also warns that the violence inflicted in same-sex relationships 'is, precisely because of its specificities, more difficult to prevent, detect and combat' (Anon. 2014).

Cecilia García, the *La Razón* columnist, articulates a very similar discourse since the aim of her article is again to equate the two forms of aggression. She argues that just like heterosexual relationships, same-sex relationships 'can also be toxic, poisoned by possessiveness, revenge, and inequality between the partners'. We may therefore say that both opinion articles in our corpus encourage their readers to reflect on the social environment and the political system in order to raise awareness of the need to address intragender violence in a similar way as PVAW is managed today.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

Our analysis of the messages delivered by the associations and media sources on violence in same-sex relationships shows that both of the above express a desire to generate social awareness of the seriousness of the phenomenon; i.e. in their discourse they aim to problematize the phenomenon so that the public authorities can articulate a response by using appropriate measures and resources. The communicative actions of both the activist and journalistic arenas therefore have the same objective, and the process is currently located in a phase between the alarming recognition of the problem and the legitimization of the group that is demanding that the authorities introduce measures. However, while the two stakeholders display a certain agreement regarding the main contextualization of the problem, there remains a certain distance between the two discourses analysed. With regard to the LGBTQI movement, we have seen that some organizations that have managed to get their voices heard in the media – the national federation, for example – are appealing for a specific law and striving to differentiate intragender violence from PVAW. Other organizations, on the other hand, equate the two forms.

With regard to media discourse, we have seen that it is more common to equate PVAW with intragender violence and that this is done using strategies such as the discursive modality and the inclusion of expert sources. Unfortunately – as the defenders of the specific nature of intragender violence assert – equating the two forms of violence implies that the meaning of the concept of *violencia machista* (male-based violence) is erased, as this excerpt from one report illustrates: ‘the consequences of gender violence (and, we should not forget, of the violence some women inflict on men) are no different from those of intragender violence’ (*El Correo*, 22 November 2014).

Contrary to our starting hypothesis, our analysis indicates that the media narrative is more consistent than that of the LGBTQI movement when it comes to collectively interpreting this type of violence. Both narratives, however, were equally demanding about the need to take action. When speaking of PVAW, perhaps in order to make the stories more attractive and comprehensible, media discourse may be structured according to a scheme that exists in the mind of the audience as well as in journalistic practices. In any case, what this study has shown is that the media are beginning to openly ask how these cases should be considered by society. This is illustrated by some of the titles of the articles – ‘Male-based violence or domestic violence?’ (*Eldiario.es*, 20 November 2014) and ‘Is gay violence male-based violence?’ (*El Mundo*, 26 November 2014) – and has become especially evident since the murder of Basque actor Koldo Losada by his husband. Significantly, most reports on intragender violence published in Spain and examined in this study appeared after Losada’s murder, which was committed on 19 November 2014. As an expert quoted in the *Interviú* report (22 December 2014) stated, ‘the murder of actor Koldo Losada brought intragender violence into the media and onto the street’.

This was not the first case of intragender violence. However, the fact that the victim enjoyed a certain degree of celebrity thanks to his profession gave it greater impact. The event proved to be a turning point, just as the 1997 murder of Ana Orantes (Berganza 2003; Vives-Cases 2005; Marín et al. 2011; Gámez 2012), a victim of male-based violence, did for PVAW: after her death, the media and other social and political institutions began to view this type of violence with more accuracy and greater commitment. The development of this incipient public reflection on intragender violence will reveal whether the collective and institutional response to it also accepts the existence of a social problem.

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Culture War

Affective Cultural Politics, Trepid Nationalism and Art Activism
By Camilla Møhring Reestorff



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The culture wars have sparked prominent political debates for many years, but particularly in Europe and America since 2001. Focusing specifically on Denmark, *Culture War* aims to analyse and understand the rise of right-wing nationalism in Europe as part of the globalization and mediatization of the modern nation state and the culture war and politics arising from it.

Employing a detailed and critically reflective argument covering social media, television, political campaigns, advertising and 'artivism', **Camilla Møhring Reestorff** refuses the traditional distinction between the world of visual culture and the political domain, and she provides multiple tools for understanding the dynamics of contemporary affective cultural politics in a highly mediatized environment.



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Gender politics of the ‘war of narratives’: Russian TV-news in the times of conflict in Ukraine

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the gender politics of the news broadcast on the Russian state-controlled TV channels – Channel One (Pervyj kanal), Russia-1 (Rossiya-1), Russia-24 (Rossiya-24), NTV and RT (formerly Russia Today) – from January to September 2015, a period when the TV news closely followed the conflict in Ukraine and the growing tensions between Russia and Europe. The study shows that the news on the state-controlled TV channels interpret the state politics in only one possible way – ascribing the most traditional and essentialist characteristics to the country, prioritizing male actors and military activities and suggesting no alternatives to ‘(re)masculinization’ of the image of Russia in the situation of the conflict on the territory of another state, despite the alleged disengagement of the country in it. The article concludes that the state-controlled TV channels use essentialist gendering as a part of nation-branding and nation-building strategies, with an aim to construct the gendered and intersectionalized ideology of the ‘Russian world’ that would target both internal and external audiences and go beyond the borders of the Russian Federation.

KEYWORDS

gendering
gender politics
news
Russia
television
Ukraine

1. For an overview of the situation with direct and indirect control of the TV segment by the state in Russia see: Hutchings and Rulyova (2009), Hutchings and Miazhevich (2010), Kiriya and Degtereva (2010), Vartanova (2013, 2017).

INTRODUCTION

The studies of media discourses in periods of conflict point to the confluence of nationalist and gendered discourses as characteristic of reporting in the involved countries (e.g., on Russia, see Riabov 2013, on Yugoslavia in 1991, see Pankov et al. 2011). The logic of war discourse is polarizing (Pankov et al. 2011: 1044) and the border between Us and Others is often demarcated in media discourses by ascribing masculine attributes to the first and demasculinized attributes to the latter (Riabov 2013). Media tend to put in the centre the most traditional gender archetype of the strong masculine warrior who defends the state and is placed on the top of the patriarchal gender order (Edenborg 2015, Riabov 2013, Yuval-Davis 1997).

Contemporary conflicts are often characterized as 'diffused' (Hoskins and O'Loughlin 2010), or 'hybrid wars' – 'wars of narratives and arms' (Sherr 2015), where information is one of the most important components of weaponry. Relations between Russia and Ukraine during the ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine make a specific case: Russia denies its military engagement in the conflict, but its participation in information war is not doubted by media scholars (see Khaldarova and Pantti 2016; Nygren and Hök 2016). What role do gender discourses play in this specific 'war of narratives'?

This study focuses on the representation of the current crisis in Ukraine in the news broadcast from January to September 2015 on the Russian – in different ways state-controlled – TV channels¹: state-owned Russia-1 (Rossiya-1) and Russia-24 (Rossiya-24), mainstreaming the state ideology and government-funded RT (formerly called Russia Today), partly state-owned Channel One (Pervyj kanal) and NTV with state corporation Gazprom as the main shareholder. The article highlights the gender politics of this representation and role of gendering in nation-building and nation-branding in the period of conflict. The events in Ukraine that started after protests in Kyiv in November 2013 calling for closer integration with the European Union – change of government, loss of Crimea after a referendum in spring 2014 and the still ongoing weapon conflict in the East of the country between the national army and rebels of the 'People's Republics' of Donetsk and Luhansk – have received international attention. Different actors construct different narratives and counter-narratives to describe and interpret the situation (Khaldarova and Pantti 2016). Addressing both domestic and international audiences through broadcast media, Russia attempts to achieve approval of its international politics (Khaldarova 2015). Denying Russia's direct involvement in the conflict, its state-controlled media frame the crisis in Ukraine as a result of the spread of nationalist ideas in the bordering country and western interest behind the regime change (Khaldarova and Pantti 2016; with a reference to Cottiero et al. 2015, Hansen 2015). This framing of the situation in the Russian media became labelled as disinformation and fabrication of news by Ukrainian actors – for example, the StopFake project (Khaldarova and Pantti 2016). The accusations of propaganda resulted in several Russian state-controlled TV channels being banned and included into sanctions lists by Ukraine, and were temporarily also banned in several other countries (Lithuania, Latvia, Moldova) (Richter 2015).

This article continues the discussion of the coverage of the Ukrainian crisis in the Russian media that attracts a close scholarly attention (e.g. Khaldarova and Pantti 2016, Pantti 2016). At the same time, it builds on previous research on (re)masculinization of Russia in mediated discourses (Riabov and Riabova 2014), which has not been focused on the current situation. My hypothesis is

that despite the fact that the Russian state-controlled TV channels pronounce that the country is not involved in the Ukrainian conflict as a combatant, they use gender discourses for the purposes of nation building and branding, and draw the border between gendered Us and Others. Building on the existing scope of research, this article demonstrates the value of using a gender perspective to study the 'war of narratives'.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to understand which news discourses are being constructed on the Russian state-controlled TV in the period of conflict in Ukraine, it is important to describe the broader context. According to cultural studies scholars, Russia today is going through a 'conservative revolution' (Etkind and Filippov 2015) or '(re)turn' (Makarychev et al. 2015, Strukov 2015) that affects all aspects of societal life. With its ambition to get all closer to the most private aspects of the citizens' life (Strukov 2015), the conservative (re)turn affects the domain of gender. As such, the scandal around the punk group Pussy Riot and the enactment of the law forbidding 'propaganda for non-traditional sexual relations among minors' fed into what sociologists Temkina and Zdravomyslova call 'politicization of gender in the last decade of Putin's Russia' (2014: 253). Gender has turned into a 'political trigger', a platform for both dominant (conservative) ideology mainstreaming and for political activism (Voronova and Kalinina 2015).

An essential part of this conservative (re)turn is a process that Riabov and Riabova (2014) label '(re)masculinization of Russia'. This process is characterized by 'creating attractive images of national masculinity and attributing masculine characteristics to the country, while the opposition seeks to counteract this activity' (Riabov and Riabova 2014: 23). The scholars write that this process has started with Putin's regime in the 2000s and signified the end of the 'feminization' and 'othering' of Russia in the international arena in the 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. (Re)masculinization has become a part of the strategy of turning Russia into a subject rather than an object of international politics, and maintained the popularity of the national leader and the state ideology. The usage of gender metaphors, according to the scholars,

serves as an effective mechanism of the production of power hierarchies.

Interpreting the feminine as something second-rate and subordinate determines the main form of exploitation of gender metaphors: We are represented as being masculine and They as feminine, a tendency found often in internal political infighting and in foreign policy propaganda.

(Riabov and Riabova 2014: 24)

These gendered representations of Us and Them are, in their turn, based on culturally shaped norms relating to established images of masculinity and femininity (Connell 2005). Masculinity and femininity have traditionally been viewed in Russia as the two opposites, leading to a predominance of the so-called 'model of two principles' in the societal institutions (Zdravomyslova 2003), where women and men are expected to demonstrate different characteristics and, thus, are involved in different activities. Like in many other contexts, this binary opposition implies that masculinity is associated with activity, rationality, competitiveness, domination, objectivity and so on, while femininity is everything that is the opposite of these characteristics (D'Amico

2. Hutchings and Miazhevich (2010: 174) label TV the 'quintessentially nation-building medium'.

and Beckman 1995). According to philosophy scholar Melikhov (2007), masculinity in Russian culture has two traditional images: Father-state and Son-rebel (outsider, marginal). Subordination required that boys and men had to possess somewhat 'feminine' characteristics in order to demonstrate that they identify with the will of the Father rather than try to counteract it. Thus, while masculinity of the Father-state was not questioned, femininity realized itself through identification with its will.

Riabov and Riabova (2014) talk about the attempts to (re)acquire the national identity through the process of (re)masculinization. A focus on media discourses, and, in particular, television² allows to trace the processes of nation building and nation branding that are oriented at creating a positive image of the nation for both the domestic and the international audiences. In these processes nations are reconstituted (Kaneva 2011: 118). According to Bolin and Ståhlberg, the media play a central role in these campaigns – 'both as technological platforms for the agency of other actors and in its own right in the form of large media companies' (2015: 3070). When it comes to the Russian state-controlled media, Vladimir Putin has successfully endeavoured to use his 'power over the national media to forge an image of a military strong, self-confident, stable and united Russia' (Hutchings and Miazhevich 2010: 178).

In the recent years, the process of nation branding has expanded to the construction of a bigger, international entity of the 'Russian world' (*russkiy mir*). This notion is largely applied by both politicians (of different camps) and media with a reference to Russian speakers and compatriots living abroad, united by the language, Orthodox traditions and shared culture (e.g., Laruelle 2015, Makarychev 2014, Russkiy Mir Foundation 2015). According to Kalinin (2015), the Russian world is constructed as a post-imperial space with external enemies and internal traitors. This world is driven by two cultural logics: the dichotomous relations between Us and Others and the symbolic invention of one's own past. The boundaries of the Russian world, thus, are defined by the cultural politics (Kalinin 2015).

Ascribing Russia traditional masculine characteristics can be viewed as a part of the processes of nation building and nation branding as gender metaphors are often used as its tools. Kaneva speaks about the 'gendered and racialized ways' in which the narratives of nation branding 'constrain national identities within a commercial logic' (2011: 132). Scholars discuss the importance of the context when gendered discourses are used as tools for nation branding (Miazhevich 2010, Tägil 1995, Yablokov 2014) and nation building (Kuehnast and Nechemias 2004). In periods of conflict and in war discourses, scholars can observe an acceleration of demarcating borders of national communities and creating images of Others by using gender images, symbols and metaphors (Riabov 2008, 2013). What makes gender discourses so useful in this demarcation of the borders, according to Riabov (2008), is that the gender discourse allows for 'humanizing' the national community, making it closer to the everyday experiences of the person and ensuring the functioning of 'banal nationalism' (Billig 1995).

The gender 'discourses, norms, unspoken assumptions and empathetic identifications', according to Kitzinger (1998: 201), can be understood as manifestations of 'gender-politics' in media, and more particularly, news production. These manifestations can be understood, in their turn, as a result of gendering. Gendering is defined as the processes by which gendered representations in the media content materialize (Voronova 2014: 35–36). Gendering takes different forms depending on the context and the given

culture of journalism: it can be essentialist – understanding gender as equal to sex and manifesting in irrelevant spotlighting of gender and gender stereotyping in the news³ – or reflexive – based on an understanding of gender as a critical concept and resulting in counter-stereotyping and gender-aware stories (Voronova 2014: 36).

The analysis of the material presented below is based on understanding nation branding and nation building as mediated processes that assumingly accelerate the distinction between (gendered) Us and Others during times of conflict, despite the Russian state-controlled media's denial of Russia's direct involvement in it. These processes are contextualized and understood as a part of the conservative (re)turn.

3. Gender stereotypes are stereotypical, culturally based interpretations of femininity and masculinity and women's and men's roles in society (Hermes 2013: 7).

MATERIAL AND METHOD

This article explores political news broadcast on the Russian state-controlled TV channels – Channel One (Pervyj kanal), Russia-1 (Rossiya-1), Russia-24 (Rossiya-24), NTV and RT (formerly Russia Today) from January to September 2015. The choice of the period is explained by several factors. First, the news during this time constantly followed the conflict in Ukraine and escalation of the tensions between Russia and Europe. I assume that the conflict served as an accelerator for the process of (re)masculinization of the image of Russia, where gender along with other categories became a battlefield for mediated ideologies. Second, the 70th anniversary of the victory of the Soviet Union in the Great Patriotic War was celebrated in Russia in 2015. This became yet another reason for discussions of the military image of Russia by the media (see Cottiero et al. 2015, Khaldarova and Pantti 2016). It is important to see whether the ways in which the Great Patriotic War has been reconstructed in media discourses during the conflict in Ukraine correspond with what previously was described by scholars concerning the role of gender in discourses of conflict (e.g., Riabov 2013).

Vartanova defines the interactions between the media and the authorities in Russia as paternalist, where the media appear as an 'obedient child' of the state (2013: 109). The media system in Russia, according to scholars, is characterized by the authoritarian approach by the government: tight financial and political control over the owners of the major media and administrative and economic control of journalists (Pasti and Nordenstreng 2013). According to Vartanova (2013), the top-down government control is especially characteristic for the journalistic practices in the television sector. The state is the key player on the TV market both through regulation by legal acts and financing: funding coming from the government is comparable to income from commercial advertising (Vartanova 2017: 98). Hutchings and Rulyova (2009) suggest that the state conducts a 'remote control' of the television in Russia. According to Kiriya and Degtereva (2010: 40), the state does not necessarily have to be an owner of the channel in order to control it. The authors define three types of the state control of the TV segment in Russia: direct control (ownership), non-direct control via a state company and non-direct control 'based on informal affiliations of TV company owner with power' (2010: 48–49). Thus, according to Kiriya and Degtereva, 'the type of ownership does not play a crucial role in controlling news content of television: television news are hardly restricted and information policy is directly managed by the state administration [...] via non-formal mechanism of control'.

4. I used the domestic versions of the websites for all channels except for RT, where videos available both in the Russian and in the English versions were addressed.
5. Analysis was conducted in September–October 2015; thus, the selected dates were 12 January, 17 February, 25 March, 2 April, 8 May, 20 June, 26 July, 3 August and 8 September.

There is no stable model of public TV in Russia (Vartanova 2017: 114); thus, when it comes to ownership, there are government and private channels, and channels with shared ownership. Channel One is an example of the latter: 51% of the shares belong to the state and the rest to the private shareholders (25% belong to Natsionalnaya Media Gruppya and the rest to Roman Abramovich) (Smirnov 2014: 66). Russia-1 and Russia-24 are state-owned channels that are a part of the VGTRK group. NTV is a private channel, with its controlling stake since 2001 belonging to Gazprom-Media (Smirnov 2014: 94–96). RT is registered as an autonomous non-profit organization TV-novosti, which is funded by the federal budget (Widholm 2016).

The television sector continues to be one of the leading sectors of the Russian media landscape (along with the growing sector of Internet), with circa 160 billion rubles circulating in TV advertising in the year 2014 (Vartanova 2015). The all-national federal channels – Channel One, Russia-1 and NTV, remain the leaders of penetration, covering 95% of the Russian population (Vartanova 2013: 174), with a common share of viewers reaching 50% (Vartanova 2013: 72; Smirnov 2014: 69). Russia-24 is a channel that is available in all regions of Russia and is ascribed to the group of specialized channels (Vartanova 2013). This channel is less popular: the entire group of specialized channels, which includes thirteen others, has a share of viewers reaching 20% (Vartanova 2013: 72, 174). This channel was included in the sample as it offers news broadcasts 24/7.

The prime target of these channels is the national audience. However, their audiences also include Russian-speakers abroad, which resulted in heated debates about propaganda and an information war during the years 2014–15 (Richter 2015). Channel One broadcasts all around the world, and there is a special company, Pervyj kanal. Vsemirnaya set (Channel One. International network), which is responsible for the broadcasts abroad. There are five international versions of the Channel One. According to the international page of the channel's website, their audiences are comprised of 250 million viewers who live all around the world (Channel One, International version 2015). The content of the channel Russia-1 is also broadcast abroad through an international channel of VGTRK, RTR-Planeta, available via both cable and satellite. NTV also has an international version, NTV-Mir.

While the channels described above broadcast primarily in Russian, the government-funded multilingual RT (formerly Russia Today) targets international audiences and not necessarily Russian speakers. It has three global news channels broadcasting in English, Spanish and Arabic. According to the website of the channel, RT has a global reach of 'over 700 million people in 100+ countries' (RT 2015a). It overtly states that it is mainstreaming the Russian state ideology: 'RT provides an alternative perspective on major global events, and acquaints an international audience with the Russian viewpoint' (RT 2015a).

The analysis was conducted in September–October 2015. The aim was to analyse how the Ukrainian conflict was covered in the news. I started the selection by searching for the news produced during year 2015 available on all of the channels' websites by using the key-words 'Ukraina' ('Ukraine'), 'konflikt v Ukraine' ('conflict in Ukraine'), 'ukrainskiy konflikt' ('Ukrainian conflict'), etc.⁴ The news videos about or related to Ukraine appeared on a daily basis. However, by doing this I could only access the web versions of the news. In order to receive a picture of what a Russian viewer could see when switching on a TV set, I constructed a synthetic week (second Monday in January, third Tuesday in February, etc., all in all, nine days⁵) and analysed all evening news programmes broadcasted these days on Channel One, Russia-1 and NTV.

| Channel | Ownership | Audience share, % (in Russia, for 2013) | Broadcasting outside Russian borders | Type of broadcasting | Type of channel |
|-------------|---|---|--|--|--------------------|
| Channel One | Shared: 51% – state, 49% – private owners | 13.8 | all around the world, five international versions, via Pervyj kanal. Vsemirnaya set' | Terrestrial, digital, accessible for all | Common interest |
| Russia 1 | State media holding VGTRK | 12.8 | an international channel of VGTRK, RTR-Planeta | Terrestrial, digital, accessible for all | Common interest |
| NTV | Gazprom Media Group | 12.7 | an international version, NTV-Mir | Terrestrial, digital, accessible for all | Common interest |
| Russia 24 | State media holding VGTRK | 1.2 | an international channel of VGTRK, RTR-Planeta | Cable and satellite, digital, accessible for all | Specialized, news |
| RT | non-profit organization funded by the federal budget | – | Majorly aimed at international audiences in 100+ countries, three global news channels broadcasting in English, Spanish and Arabic | Cable and satellite | Specialized, news |

Sources: Kiriya and Degtereva (2010); Vartanova (2017: 94–124).

Table 1: TV channels: Characteristics.

Evening news are 'television rituals [...] which work to reinforce the sense of national community both Anderson and Billig had in mind' (Hutchings and Miazhevitch 2010: 175). These news programmes were on the Channel One – *Vremya* (1968/95–present), 21:00, on Russia-1 – *Vesti* (1991–present) and its Saturday and Sunday versions *Vesti v subbotu* (1991/2008–present) and *Vesti nedeli* (2001–present), 20:00, and on NTV – *Segodnya* (1993–present), 19:00. This first part of the video material was collected via an Internet archive TV-novosti.ru (<http://tv-novosti.ru/arhiv>), which allows for watching the full versions of actual news broadcasted on the channels.⁶

In addition, through the search on the channels' websites, I selected several media events⁷ (Couldry et al. 2010, Dayan and Katz 1992) – the 70th anniversary of the victory in the Great Patriotic War, air show MAKS-2015, festival 'Army of Russia', war and technical forum 'Army-2015', International Army Games, and Tank Biathlon, which attracted the attention of the channels during this period. News videos on these events were important to analyse in the context of this study, taking into account the media events' role in the context of conflict, nation branding and nation building. All in all, 48 videos of different length (i.e., both news items within the news programmes and separate videos on the websites) were analysed.

The sample did not intend to be representative, and yet, it provides a selection of the gendered representations of and around the Ukrainian conflict

6. Not all of the 'Segodnya' news programmes were available in the archive.

7. Often it is the media events – events or activities that exist for the purpose of media publicity (Couldry et al. 2010, Dayan and Katz 1992) – that become platforms for the nation-branding and nation-building campaigns (Bolin and Ståhlberg 2015).

that were constructed on the Russian television in 2015, which allowed for comparison with the results of the previous research on the role of gendering in media in the conflicts. When it comes to the coverage of events that I selected for analysis myself (such as the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the victory in the Great Patriotic War), there is a potential bias as these events were intentionally chosen by me based on their militarized and gendered character. However, the synthetic week sampling allowed for a less biased approach, and it showed that military events and male actors were prioritized by the channels during the selected period. It would be right to note here that the military sphere, like the political one (e.g., Global Gender Gap Report 2016), is dominated by men in Russia.

I conducted a thematic analysis (Jensen 2002) of the news items based on the main theoretical constructs described above – nation building, nation branding, gendering and (re)masculinization. Gender was the main category of analysis, although it became clear in the process of the analysis that other intersectional categories (Collins 2000) – ethnicity, race, sexuality, physical capability, etc., in nation branding and nation building in the times of conflict are very relevant and need a closer scholarly investigation. I discuss the relevance of these categories for the analysis in its last part.

As essentialist gendering implies irrelevant spotlighting of gender and gender stereotyping in the news, I was attentive to the usage of gender stereotypes (i.e., traditional interpretations of masculinity and femininity) in the choice of actors in specific contexts and the way in which the actors and the contexts were shown and commented on in the news, both in the choice of words and in camera angles. My main focus, thus, was on the *actors* who are chosen by the media to represent Russia and Ukraine, the *context*, in which they appear and the gendered *language* that is used in the news to describe the actors and the events. I was searching for the features of (re)masculinization suggested by Riabov and Riabova (2014) – ‘attractive images of national masculinity’, ‘masculine characteristics of the country’ and ‘feminization of the significant Others’ through ascribing another country, in this case Ukraine, opposite characteristics – to see whether and how these unfold in the TV-news coverage of the situation in Ukraine and around it. In the process of the analysis, it occurred that apart from ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ there appeared new actors and related to them new focus in the news compared to the features of (re)masculinization defined previously – ‘Them ready to become Us’. A new theme was identified – ‘expansion and gendering of the Russian world’.

ANALYSIS

In this part of the article, I present the main themes that resulted from the analysis of the news items. I start by speaking about (re)masculinization of Russia during the conflict through the prioritization of male actors by the channels and presentation of traditional masculine features as attractive and characteristic for the Russian national identity. I continue by presenting the ways of de-masculinization of the image of Ukraine. Finally, I turn to the construction of the ‘Russian world’ in the news and how, in particular, essentialist gendering is used to construct symbolic borders between Us and Others.

Who may represent Russia? The hero of today

Speaking about the ongoing project of (re)masculinization of Russia, Riabov and Riabova (2014) point to the fact that Russian President, Vladimir Putin, is

presented as *the* attractive image of national masculinity, often with the help of militarization and eroticization (on the sexualization of Vladimir Putin's image see also Sperling 2014). The militarization of the image of the national leader is maintained in the news of the state-controlled channels from January to September 2015. The Russian president appears increasingly more in the role of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief (this title is used by the correspondents and news anchors) and surrounded by military men (for example, Sergey Shoigu, the Minister of Defence, Zarubin 2015).

The war discourse is present in the news in this period, in particular, in connection to the commemoration of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War. In the news during 2015, the audience sees Vladimir Putin laying wreaths at the memorials to the soldiers of the Great Patriotic and the Second World War in both his domestic (e.g. in Kaliningrad region – *Vremya*, 6 July) and foreign trips (in Budapest, Hungary, – *Vesti*, 17 February). It is emphasized in the text of the latter news video that the laying of wreaths was prioritized by the Russian leader, who started his work visit by paying tribute to the fallen soldiers. Thus, the discourse of warfare, usually associated with masculinity, is present in the construction of the attractive image of the national leader. The mediated memory of the Great Patriotic War is used for the processes of both nation building and nation branding, where nationhood is built around the memory of the Great Victory and Russia is branded as a peace-maker and guardian of the history (cf. Khaldarova and Pantti 2016).

Among all the analysed news items, only one features the Russian president in a different role. He is shown as a caring Father of the nation when he clutches a cat belonging to one of the dwellers of new houses in Russian village Krasnopol'e built after the forest fires (*Segodnya*, 4 September). This image appears as ambiguous. On the one hand, it serves the need to show that the national leader can act differently depending on the public. He can be a Russian-style macho in all situations related to international politics and show his caring side to the Russian citizens. On the other hand, this image can be understood as self-referential irony, which is characteristic for postmodernist media texts (Colletta 2009). It allows to read the image of the President with a cat in his hands as a media text with the potential to go viral in social networks (after all, in the post-human era we live in, who does not want to post a cat on one's timeline? – see Berland 2008).

The state-controlled channels suggest other examples of attractive Russian masculinity to the audiences as well. Among the representatives of Russian Federation and the Russian politics on the international arena are Sergey Shoigu, the Minister of Defence, who always wears military uniform; Sergey Lavrov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who is presented in the TV-news as a symbol of rationality that counteracts the 'chaotic' and 'irrational' European and American leadership (e.g. *Vremya*, 12 January); and Sergey Ivanov, the then Chief of the Presidential Administration, who comments not only on the domestic situation but also on the international situation threatened by the neo-nationalistic tendencies in Europe (Russia-24 2015b). The male representatives of the Duma too appear as warrantors of peace in Russia: in the evening news block *Vremya* (20 June) on the eve of commemoration of the beginning of the Great Patriotic War, the Duma deputies are shown passing the GTO ('Ready for work and defence') norms that had been re-established for the first time after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Russian male politicians are shown as complying with the norms of the culturally and historically shaped hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995), dominant masculinity of

the Father-state (Melikhov 2007). Militarized, rational, morally and physically strong, these male politicians are presented to the citizens as an ideal to live up to.

A big role in the nation branding of Russia as both peacemaker and holder of traditional values is assigned by the TV channels to the representatives of the Russian Orthodox church, and in particular to Patriarch Kirill of Moscow (*Vremya*, 17 February). Other representatives of the church often surround Vladimir Putin in his trips around the regions of Russia as, for example, during his visit to Crimea (*Vesti v subbotu*, 12 September). This appearance of the religious actors in the news falls within the tendency of 'patriarchal renaissance' (the term is introduced by Posadskaya 1993) that started immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the times of conflict, it also signifies the ideology of the conservative (re)turn, where the militarization and (re)masculinization of Russia are merging with the overall domination of the patriarchal traditions.

This somewhat paradox mixture, taking into account the atheist past of the Soviet Union, is best illustrated by the news about a joint celebration of the Day of Airborne Forces (VDV) and a religious holiday of Saint Ilya showing the representatives of the airborne forces participating in a religious procession (*krestniy khod*). The correspondent in just a three-minute report talks about Saint Ilya as a suitable patron for the military as he is a 'lord of lightning' and about the traditions of the airborne forces representatives to dip in fountains and break watermelons with foreheads on that day, after which the reporter refers to the Soviet Union hero Vasily Margelov, who is considered to be a founder of the Airborne Forces in Russia (Podkovenko 2015). The news report creates a continuity without abruptions between the pagan, imperial and Soviet past and the present, where the two patrons of the airborne forces, Saint Ilya and Vasily Margelov, coexist in the constructed masculine reality of today's Russia.

Who is not Us? Feminizing the Others through de-masculinizing them

According to Riabov and Riabova (2014), the (re)masculinization of Russia implies a simultaneous feminization of the significant Others who are denied the positively connoted 'masculine' characteristics that Russia assumingly possesses. In their article, the scholars describe the *demasculinization* of Ukraine in the gas scandals of 2006 and 2009, when both the Russian political leaders and the state-controlled media channels actively used gender metaphors portraying Ukraine as a 'picky girl' and a 'flighty Ukrainian mistress' (see Riabov and Riabova 2014). The scholars also talk about the construction of neologism 'Gayropa' that appeared in the Russian discourses in the 2010s in order to point to homosexuality (or, as it is articulated in Russian language, 'homosexuality') as 'the essence of the European lifestyle', making Europe a 'degenerate civilization' and Russia – a 'bastion of "moral principles"' (Riabov and Riabova 2014: 27).

During the conflict in Ukraine, the TV news produced by the state-controlled Russian channels show the same tendency, which resonates with the war propaganda discourses (cf. Riabov 2013, n.d.; Riabova and Romanova 2012). The news about Ukraine largely focused on women and elderly as victims of nationalists and 'sadists' (*Vesti*, 2 April). RT features a video of an elderly man getting his St. George ribbon, a symbol of Victory Day, torn off

(RT 2015c). Channel One shows despaired Ukrainian mothers demonstrating in the streets with the wish to return their children home alive from the Ukrainian army (*Vremya*, 17 February). The news reports on the conflict in Eastern Ukraine focus on Ukrainian military surrendering to the rebels or fleeing to the Russian territory (e.g. *Vesti*, 25 March). The viewer sees the soldiers standing on their knees, while the reporter comments on the poor state of the Ukrainian army as the soldiers are obliged to buy the ammunition themselves and often are 'left over' by the commanders (*Vremya*, 17 February). Thus, in the period of the conflict, demasculinization of Ukraine is continuing, which can be traced through the TV channels' choice of passive actors and victimization of them through the focus on their weaknesses.

The Ukrainian politicians become another target of the essentialist, uncritical to stereotypes, gendering by the Russian state-controlled TV channels. Politicians are portrayed as confused, passive and dependent, very different from how the Russian political actors (as well mainly men) appear in the same news. *Vremya* (26 July) accuses Petro Poroshenko, the President of Ukraine, of 'helplessness'. Arseniy Yatsenyuk, the then Prime Minister of Ukraine, appears as someone who puts himself in an 'awkward situation' due to his 'scandalous statements about the Second World War' (*Vesti*, 12 January). Maria Gaidar (daughter of a famous Russian politician Egor Gaidar), who moved to Ukraine from Russia to become the Vice-Governor of the Odessa region, and formerly a political activist in Russia, is accused of a constant change of opinions and political views, and is portrayed in the news as embarrassed and completely dependent on the male politicians (*Vremya*, 26 July).

Ukraine itself is labelled 'a state under external control' (*Vremya*, 26 July). The Russian news warns both Russians and Ukrainians about the dangers of the dependency on the European culture of tolerance and permissiveness. Russia-24 in a live broadcast tells about the visit of Sir Elthon John to Petro Poroshenko, where the reporter ironically comments on the 'rainbow perspectives' of the rapprochement between Ukraine and Europe (Mironova 2015). Russia-1 shows a sex festival on the territory of Ukraine where different kinds of 'deviations' are promoted by European citizens to the Ukrainian as 'a sign of welcoming' Ukraine to Europe (*Vesti*, 26 July). Thus, Ukraine as a country is portrayed by the Russian state-controlled channels in this period as weak, dependent and mixed up – characteristics that in the conflict discourse especially are often assigned to the countries on the opposite side in order to play down the positive – 'masculine' – features and emphasize the negative – 'feminine' – characteristics (see Riabov 2013, n.d.). Interpreting the image of Ukraine as 'feminized' by being denied the 'masculine' characteristics Russia is ascribed in the TV-news may be a gendered reading itself. Yet, if we recall the traditional interpretation of masculinity and femininity as the two opposites, the way TV-news show Ukraine in 2015 can be understood as feminization of the country through its de-masculinization.

The world of (white, young, physically capable) men: Branding the 'Russian world'

So far, I have described the gender politics of the state-controlled TV channels when it comes to the portrayal of Russia and Ukraine in the news broadcasts. Yet, it occurred that the process of (re)masculinization in this period expanded to the construction of a bigger, international entity of the 'Russian

world'. The Russian state-controlled channels in the period of conflict in Ukraine actively take upon themselves the role of promoting the 'Russian world' with all its constituents. The viewers of Channel One learned that 'the Russian army has become as much a brand as *matreshka*, *balalaika* and vodka' while they were demonstrated a collection of a newly opened shop *Armiya Rossii* (Army of Russia), where everyone can buy clothes that look like those of the Russian military (Akinchenko 2015). The correspondent emphasized the relationship between this commercial initiative and the Russian Ministry of Defence, showing a travelling bag that had been developed by the Minister of Defence himself. Further, the news highlighted that there is a lot of foreign attention for these clothes and stated that there is an ambition to open these shops in other countries as well. The reporter commented that the Russian (male) citizens have an advantage of getting the clothes for free – by serving in the army, however, foreigners are not denied the possibility to, so to say, join the club: they can buy clothes while visiting Russia or online. The target audience of the shop became clear when one visited the online shop of *Armiya Rossii* (<https://armiyarossii.ru>): a video that one could see on the website in 2015, featured young, white, physically capable men who were encouraged to 'start a new life' by engaging in military activities, fighting with enemies and overcoming themselves. Being a part of the Russian world or even pretending to be by wearing clothes designed for and by the Russian army is presented by the Russian state-controlled TV channels as advantageous, adventurous and exclusive.

Several events that were aimed among others to attest the high status of the Russian military drew broad media attention in spring and summer months of 2015. Some of them, such as the celebration of the Victory Day with a military parade on the Red Square in Moscow, or MAKS Airshow (held since 1992) are well familiar to the public. Others were a result of much more recent initiatives: as such, the International Tank Biathlon – a mechanized military sport – was introduced by the Russian military in 2013, and in 2015, the International Army Games – where representatives of seventeen national armies took part in – were held for the first time.

All of these activities can be understood as media events that, similar to the sport championships (Hundley and Billings 2009), build a platform for 'banal nationalism' and allow for showing Russia as a powerful country on the international arena. The participants of the events are dominantly (military) men and the activities that they are engaged in are directly connected to the war discourse traditionally related to masculinity. Yet, the technique, the activities and the show itself are expected to be enjoyed not only by male viewers but also by women. This is expressed by a female correspondent of RT reporting from the Tank Biathlon and pronouncing while caressing one of the tanks: 'Actually, it's pretty tempting' (Pilbeam 2015). With their function of showing the latest inventions of the Russian military industry, the skills of the Russian military unfold in competition with representatives of foreign forces, and commemoration of the most celebrated victory of the contemporary history – in the Great Patriotic War, all these events serve the strategies of both nation building and nation branding.

The process of branding the Russian world coincides with the building of it. The Russian world is promoted not only to invite investors and tourists, which is typical for nation branding (see Bolin and Ståhlberg 2015), but also to present it as a space welcoming the public to become a part of this world. The boundaries of this world are symbolic and flexible,

dependent on the time and the space (Kalinin 2015). The 'time-space' of Crimea appears as one of the platforms for demonstrating the inclusiveness of the Russian world. As such, Channel One shows Ukrainian male students of the Nakhimov Naval School in Sevastopol who chose to stay under the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation and 'serve Russia' after Crimea had become its part (*Vremya*, 20 June). Russia-1 follows Vladimir Putin and the former Prime Minister of Italy Silvio Berlusconi on their visit to Crimea. Surrounded by the dwellers scanning 'Putin! Thank you for Russia! You are the best president!', Vladimir Putin comments, 'You are the best, *muzhiki*! Behind the backs of such true men one can stand and do everything' (*Vesti v subbotu*, 12 September). Thus, the Russian world flexibly includes the new members, but – as suggested by the state-controlled TV channels, the ones who are recognized as legitimate, or at least, as active members of the Russian world are men. Asked directly about the imperial ambitions of Russia, Vladimir Putin answered that

we have no imperial ambition. But providing a decent living to people, including Russians living abroad in countries close to us, that we can do by developing cooperation with them [...] We don't really care if a Russian is living in this or that territory behind the border, as long as he can visit his relatives freely, his living standards improve, he feels himself a person of full value, his rights are not violated, and no one forbids him to speak his language.

(quoted by RT 2015b)

While it sounds more natural in Russian to refer to an average person as 'he', the state-controlled channels seem to interpret the message in a straightforward manner. The Russian world – as constructed by the TV channels, is particularly suited for and promoted to men. Thus, the state-controlled TV channels read the signal in such a manner as if there was no other alternative to remasculinization of Russia. The conflict on the territory of the bordering state presented by the channels as a threat to Russia only accelerates this process. Anyone who identifies with the Russian state ideology and also is recognized as an active and legitimate member may become a part of the Russian world that is simultaneously branded and built through particular media events and choices of actors and focuses. Seen from a gender perspective, the border between the 'Russian world' and the rest of the world is defined by the gender politics as understood by the media producers.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis showed that from January to September 2015, the state-controlled channels Channel One, Russia-1, Russia-24, NTV and RT engaged in essentialist gendering of the images of Russia and Ukraine, and mainstreamed a very particular type of gender politics. The news discourses of the channels primarily ascribed Russia masculine characteristics, and represented the nation with men who embody an attractive national image of masculinity. The TV channels also participated in the construction of several 'masculine' media events that triumphed the progress of the Russian military industry and the skills of the Russian military forces. The Others, especially Ukraine, were presented as de-masculinized. In other words, the borders between Us and Others were based among others on gender characteristics.

In the period of conflict in Ukraine, the Russian state-controlled TV channels choose simplified narratives and a straightforward interpretation of the state's gender politics. Russia is denied its traditional feminine characteristics, although just a few years ago charity, readiness to sacrifice and universal tenderness were named by the Russian national leader as the main components of the state ideology – 'spiritual ties' (*dukhovnye skrepy*) (see Taroschina 2012). These specific Russian features no longer seem to be applicable as they refer to the feminine image of Russia, *Rossiia Matushka* (Riabov 2008), rather than the masculine Father-state (Melikhov 2007). 'Spiritual ties' continue to be mentioned in the TV-discourses, and yet, they are now strictly framed by army, (Orthodox) faith and (traditional) culture (e.g. Alpatova and Leonov 2014), and are associated with masculinity.

Essentialist gendering in the news of the Russian state-controlled channels appears as a part of nation-branding and nation-building processes that are constructed in and through the media discourses. (Re)masculinization of Russia in the period of conflict in Ukraine can be understood as a part of a more general problem of essentialist gendering in journalism, which, partly, can be explained by the context of the conservative (re)turn in Russia.

Finally, the state-controlled TV channels use utterly postmodernist mechanisms and instruments. Military activities are promoted through media events that are created with a purpose to be mediated and enjoyed by the viewers, memory is commercialized and there is a place for self-irony. What remains conservative is the type of gender relations in the society that TV channels mainstream, not questioning the gender hierarchy, the position of men and characteristics of masculinity. Despite the apparent changes in the conflicts' forms and weaponry – from a 'war of arms' to a 'war of narratives' with increasingly more sophisticated techniques – the content of the mediated gender politics in particular contexts remains the same.

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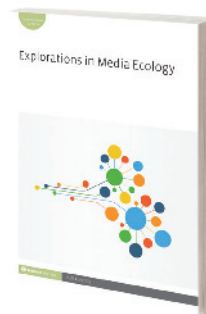
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From bullfighter's lover to female *matador*: The evolution of Madonna's gender displays in her music videos

ABSTRACT

Throughout her artistic career, Madonna has been notorious for her provocative gender displays. Academic literature has highlighted the ambivalence of many of her performances in this regard: although she occupies masculine spaces and roles, she often adopts positions that are in line with a traditional kind of femininity or with representation patterns that are part of and reinforce patriarchal discourse. Our analysis of Madonna's music videos reveals the transformation that takes place in the artist's gender displays. In this analysis we pay special attention to postfeminist features such as self-sexualization and the use of violence. Through three of the artist's videos that employ the bullfighting metaphor, we see how the representation of femininity embodied by Madonna is transformed – within the framework of a sexual and affective relationship – from her position as a victim and passive female to that of aggressor.

KEYWORDS

Madonna
postfeminism
gender display
violence
sexualization
music videos

INTRODUCTION

Madonna's video 'Living for Love' (2015) ends with a quotation from Nietzsche's book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: 'Man is the cruelest animal. At tragedies, bullfights, and crucifixions he has felt best on earth; and when he invented hell for himself, that was his very heaven'. Although, like all the other representations embodied by Madonna, this reference is somewhat ambiguous, in the context of the video we could say that its literal dimension takes us to the bullfighting performance we have just witnessed while its metaphorical dimension takes us to the song's lyrics, which speak of a lover's malice. The quotation appears to be the justification for the symbolic slaughter perpetrated by the artist. Men, who appear as bulls in the video, die after being beaten and strangled by the woman (Madonna), who is sometimes portrayed as a bullfighter and sometimes as a sexy swimsuit-clad female.

This is not the first time that Madonna has appeared as a sexy avenger. In fact, the artist has employed this and other postfeminist representations in her music videos since the 1990s. In 2003 at the MTV Video Music Awards, Madonna, dressed in black and acting as the bridegroom at a wedding ceremony, kissed both Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera in a display that portrayed gender transgression as well as her power over the artists who were sharing the stage with her. Gill (2007) termed this type of representation, now used so often in advertising and the music videos of other artists, *lesbian lipstick*, but one of the artists who set this trend was Madonna, employing controversy and scandal as at other times during her career.

However, is this also true when it comes to the use of violence? In this article we explore the evolution of the artist's image from victim to aggressor as portrayed in her music videos, situate this transformation within the broader context of postfeminist representation, and analyse the characterization of the violence employed by Madonna in three of her videos, all of which relate to bullfighting.

MADONNA, QUEEN OF REINVENTION

Madonna, whose career has spanned over 30 years, has been called both the *queen of pop* and the *queen of reinvention*: she is one of the most productive pop artists in the world (Fouz-Hernández and Jarman-Ivens 2004) and also one of the most talked-about, by people who either love her or hate her. Her status as a popular icon, her long career and the way in which she has constantly played with gender and provocation have also attracted strong interest from within the academic community. Madonna is considered an ambivalent personality whose gender displays can be transformative, configure transgressive spaces, and contain tics and stereotypes that, though reconfigured, are no less questionable. Overall, her videos show the instability of identity, while subverting the masquerade, thus making visible a certain femininity and female desire (Butler 2007).

According to Kellner (2003), the emancipating identities Madonna portrays alternate with the images of a woman who presents herself as a sexual object and promotes consumerist values. Both Fiske (1997) and Kellner (2003) believe that while the artist presents herself as an object of desire for the male gaze, her constant winking and posing in front of the camera demonstrates that she creates and controls her own image and that she is acting consciously and strategically. By simultaneously appropriating masculine spaces and

reclaiming feminine ones, in her music videos she empowers other female artists and female audiences (Lewis 1990, 1993).

Many academic reflections on Madonna are based on questions of identity and, as we have seen, recognize her role in subverting the established norms. However, they also reveal fundamental contradictions in her gender displays. Kaplan (1987) and McClary (1991) state that the duality and ambiguity of Madonna's identity displays enable her to position herself beyond patriarchal categories. According to Lemish (2003), she has based her career on questioning conventional perceptions of femininity, combining seduction and independence, and articulating a 'desire to be desired'. The author thinks Madonna's sexual provocation can be interpreted as a way of satirizing the patriarchal virgin/whore dichotomy (Lemish 2003). Mistry (2000), on the other hand, while pointing out that Madonna's performances contain transgressive elements that destabilize the binary and heteronormative gender system, stresses – along with other authors – that Madonna's position as a mainstream artist places her under suspicion for instrumentalizing subcultures for her own benefit – especially gay and transsexual subcultures (Whiteley 1997; Mistry 2000; hooks 2012).

Authors such as hooks (2012) assert that from the 1990s onwards, Madonna submits to the patriarchal gaze, objectifying herself, presenting the image of a sexy, young girl, and therefore reifying white, heterosexual supremacy. These representation patterns cohabit with a display of pop feminism in the framework of which the artist confronts aspects related to sexuality, maternity and lesbianism (Fouz-Hernández and Jarman-Ivens 2004). According to hooks (2012), we are witnessing something more than a superficial kind of performance: the artist takes up a distant position from feminist values, as she stereotypes and subjugates gay and Afro-American subcultures using an apparently transgressive image, and supports a misogynistic view of gender violence, prioritizing hedonism and embodying the phallic mother, the ideal of white femininity.

'Cause I'm a bad bitch'

While academic studies of Madonna have focused on how she constructs and plays with sex and gender, exemplifying postmodern feminism and post-feminism (Gorton and Garde-Hansen 2013), her characterization as a tough, aggressive and violent woman has practically gone unnoticed. Although Inness (2004) highlights how artists like Madonna develop their muscles in response to the images of tough women portrayed on the silver screen, she fails to explore the implications of this trend.

Since the 1990s, media representations have been characterized by, among other elements, the promotion of a postfeminist representation system that incorporates feminist discourses and values and highlights them as things that belong to the past (McRobbie 2004). This system progressively consolidates a series of representation patterns, including that of women as sexual subjects who openly express both their sexual desire and their desire to please (Gill 2007), and who are empowered by their lifestyle (Lotz 2001) or sexual agency (Gill 2008). However, postfeminist discourses remove all political content from the concept of empowerment and leaves it on an individualistic and consumerist level. In this way, in parallel to feminism, a notion of femininity is constructed that involves women having to adapt to the requirements of neo-liberalism, rather than to feminist social prerogatives (Radner 2011).

Another postfeminist strategy of women's 'empowerment' is to conform women with aggressive behaviours (Inness 2004; Gill 2008; Tortajada 2013). This characterization of women as being tough and aggressive precludes neither their erotization or sexual agency (Gill 2008; Agirre 2012), nor their glamour or attractiveness (Inness 2004; Wang and Sik Ying Ho 2007) when they use violence. These women thus appropriate traditionally masculine features while embodying classic feminine codes via sexualization and cosmeticism (Gill 2009a; Lazar 2009), thereby combining a 'girls-who-kick-ass' and a 'fashion diva' attitude (Tung 2004). Although they reproduce traditional stereotypes of beauty and race and would never go so far as to make men feel threatened, these 'tough women' put the patriarchal structure into question by defending women, attacking men who threaten them, and transforming the way in which the feminine body is constructed (Inness 2004).

Once again, the images of these women are highly contradictory as muscles, violence, sexualization and consumerist/cosmetic individualism are grouped into one figure with the underlying notion that women should not wait for men to save them and should thus be aggressive. Although this representation of women as being active and powerful partly responds to feminist demands and achievements (Inness 2004), McRobbie (2006) deliberates on the complexity of the positions of women who are seen or represented as holding power.

Seventeen of Madonna's music videos produced between 1982 and 2015 (a total of 77 videos) contain some form of violence. Our analysis of the discourse highlights the transformation of the artist when her characters are involved in conflict or violence. Although Madonna is characterized by her representation as an empowered and transgressive woman, until the mid-1990s her music videos portrayed her mainly as a victim, albeit one whose attractiveness, sensuality and even authority remained intact in front of the camera. Coinciding with the theoretical reflections we have discussed in this section, after the mid-1990s the artist's videos show her in the role of an avenger, empowered by violence. However, her music video characters are always sexually attractive and sensual, and glamour is still a feature that identifies the artist herself.

MADONNA'S MUSIC VIDEOS (1982–2015)

Until the mid-1990s, Madonna's videos – 'Burning Up' (1983), 'Open your Heart' (1986), 'Express Yourself' (1989), 'Oh Father' (1989), 'Bad Girl' (1993) and 'Take a Bow' (1994) – portray her as a victim. In each of these videos, depicting heterosexual relationships, the artist plays a different role: dependent on a sexual and affective relationship in 'Burning Up' (1983); in love and suffering in 'Take a Bow' (1994); a victim of physical and psychological abuse in 'Oh Father' (1989); as a *femme fatale*, punished for not fitting into the norm in 'Bad Girl' (1993); and liberating herself from her role as a sexual object through infidelity in 'Express Yourself' (1989). 'Express Yourself' (1989) is Madonna's most discussed music video in academia: while her infidelity, her wearing a trouser suit and carrying a monocle, and the song's lyrics at first appear to subvert gender spaces and positions, in the end – despite her hedonistic sexual agency – she remains a prisoner, as neither her submission to the capitalist who 'owns' her nor the conditions of her existence have changed.

This image of the artist changes in little over a decade. In accordance with the system of postfeminist representation progressively adopted by various

audio-visual formats, Madonna begins to portray herself as the aggressor, abandoning her condition of victim of love or victim of men. The violence in 'Music' (2000) should be interpreted as a metaphor for an artistic break with the past and her reincarnation as a sexy superhero adopting a new musical style. In 'What It Feels Like for a Girl' (2001), Madonna takes on a dominant, aggressive role, wielding her power for revenge against abstract groups of men. The leading figure is that of the *sexy avenger* who, in the battle of the sexes, must be stronger and more violent than men in order to overcome victimization and abuse that derives from it. This representation pattern is repeated in 'Girl Gone Wild' (2012), 'Gang Bang' (2012), 'Give Me All Your Luvin' (2012) and 'Living for Love' (2015). In 'Gang Bang' (2012), Madonna brandishes a gun, coldly murdering men and women who are participating in a macabre, decadent party at which she is also symbolically machine-gunned while tied to a bed. Ridden with imaginary bullets, her body shakes mid-way between death and orgasm.

As we see, Madonna does not relinquish her character as a sexual subject and aims to appear sexy by dressing provocatively and setting a trend. She changes her position towards violence in the victim/executioner dichotomy, abandoning her roles as innocent girl, *femme fatale*, good wife and long-suffering mother, and adopting those of tough female, phallic heroine and sexy avenger. In the next section we further analyse these figures through three of the artist's music videos in which this symbolic transition is observed over time through the metaphor of bullfighting.

FROM BULLFIGHTER'S LOVER TO FEMALE MATADOR OF MEN

Postfeminism, understood as the representation system for new femininities and masculinities, is a subject of critical analysis (Gill and Scharff 2011). The new representations, in the name of a 'de-politicized' feminism, add a multi-dimensional feminine agency that is hypersexual, cosmetic and aggressive. Madonna is an exponent of all of these characterizations and the transition these feminine images are experiencing in mainstream popular culture. The artist has actively incorporated these representation patterns into her performances, which are clearly influenced by and based on gender issues. In this section, we demonstrate how Madonna adopts and reconfigures several post-feminist features (Gill 2007, 2008) while constructing a femininity that is parallel to feminism and close to neo-liberalism (Radner 2011).

In 'Take a Bow' (1994) Madonna maintains a passionate but fragile relationship with a bullfighter. Her lover appears to take the initiative in the relationship, whereas the artist is the one who waits, passively, suffering. Although at one point in the video she is masturbating – which could be interpreted as an expression of her own desire and empowerment – she does this while watching images of her lover on television during a bullfight. Despite this and other fleeting moments of pleasure, it is mainly abandonment, suffering and tears that are present, particularly at the end of the video when it becomes clear that they are having a break-up.

Madonna's and the bull's fates are portrayed in parallel. Her relationship with the bullfighter is presented as an impossible one since he remains inaccessible while she suffers as a consequence. Passion and suffering are linked with a strong presence of religious imagery and Latin stereotype. 'Take a Bow' (1994) presents suffering and pain in a relationship as the other side of love. We observe several scenes of low-intensity self-inflicted violence. One of

these is when Madonna involuntarily stings herself with the needle of her brooch. She then sucks on her bleeding finger while in a parallel scene the bullfighter gathers his swords to kill the bull. She stings her finger at the very moment the sword is placed in the scabbard. Another such scene is when, after they have made love, he steps on pieces of broken glass which, metaphorically, had been broken during their act of lovemaking. Both Madonna and the bullfighter wear corsets: in her case because she usually wears tight-fitting clothes, in his case because it is part of the bullfighter's ritual costume. The violence endured by the bull is used to represent the intrinsic and inevitable suffering of the amorous relationship, which appears to end once and for all at the precise moment the bull receives the final thrust of the bullfighter's sword. This is a passionate but impossible relationship in which suffering and disappointment are represented aesthetically by the bull's fate in the ring. This idea of resentment and resignation is reinforced by the song's chorus:

I've always been in love with you (Always with you)
 I guess you've always known it's true (You know it's true)
 You took my love for granted, why oh why
 The show is over, say good-bye

In this video, Madonna embodies traditional femininity (Wood 1994): although she is also portrayed as a sexual subject (Gill 2007), her role is that of a passive, weak and dependent woman. The sexual and affective relationship depicted is a traditional one. Passion and stability seem incompatible. He embodies strength, while she embodies beauty (Gómez 2004; Araña et al. 2013a).

Interestingly, Madonna's male and female fans alike reject this character, as shown in a reception study on this particular music video (Araña et al. 2013b). Some people in this study thought Madonna's sexual desire had its origin in her love for bullfighting and bullfighters, that the bullfighter actually dies in the video, that everything that happens in the video is a dream, that she goes to the bullring dressed in mourning because she wants the bullfighter to die, and she cries for the bull. Oddly, in the video Madonna is not wearing a mourning dress, the bullfighter does not die, and she does not cry for the bull. These aberrant interpretations are explained, in the words of her fans, by the notion that she is not suited for this role and that she falls in love with the bullfighter even though she does not like bullfighting. One fan even stated that 'the artist wants to confuse you because in the end you realize that it is us, the viewers, who are most sexist or driven by stereotypes'. In this way, both male and female fans transfer their anti-bullfighting values (strength, independence and resolution) and the defense of an alternative femininity onto the artist (Araña et al. 2013b).

The sequel of 'Take a Bow' (1994) is 'You'll See' (1995), where the bullfighting metaphor is used again. In this video, Madonna ends the relationship that has made her suffer and it is the man's turn to be hurt. This time we see the man in the bullring but there is no bull. Dressed in street clothing, with contained rage, he simulates the thrust of a sword. But unlike in 'Take a Bow' (1994), where the sword was lowered at the climax of the sexual act, the man now turns the sword towards himself and simulates stabbing himself in the heart. As the video continues, he gets hurt repeatedly because he puts himself in danger. This is the only time that the violence is self-inflicted and directed towards the male character.

What empowers the woman in the video is the fact that she has broken off a relationship that was making her suffer. The song's lyrics are both a response to what she thinks are the man's thoughts (*You think that I can't live without your love*; and *You think that I can never laugh again*), as well as a kind of vindication (*You'll see, somehow, some day*). The man appears devastated by losing his lover. The fact that he follows her and seems crestfallen when he sees her going away gives her false empowerment as well as pleasure. Ultimately the man's suffering seems to be rewarded in the form of a possible reunion – though it is not clear if he is the person who appears in the final scene.

Although in this second part of the story Madonna looks into the camera, resolute and defiant, declaring that she will not be defeated by love and that she will rebuild her life, and repeating the mantra *You'll see*, the end of the video leads one to think that what the artist has set in motion is not unlike the advice teenage magazines give their readers about dating and coping with break-ups. Although she is not wearing tight-fitting clothes anymore and appears more radiant, she still does not abandon the classic representation patterns of feminine beauty. This may be justified, however, by the fact that this video, filmed in sepia tones, is intended to depict an indeterminate moment in the mid-twentieth century and its aesthetic connotations.

This characterization is more in line with representations of strong, independent women who no longer submit to domesticity or romantic relationships (Blackman 2006). However, we could also say that this freedom is restricted to a feminine identity that is acceptable within the framework of patriarchal parameters (Lazar 2009). The artist's potential empowerment merely refers us to a psychological project in which she participates (Blackman 2006) and does not reject the idea that, for her, getting a man is the most important thing in life (Gill 2009a).

'Living for Love' (2015) contains, again, bullfighting references but this time Madonna is the bullfighter, and the men are characterized as bulls. In the video Madonna fights the men/bulls, who are indistinguishable from each other as they are wearing masks. She is standing upright whereas the men/bulls are usually on all fours but then stand up to launch their attacks. She repels these skilfully, first with her cape and then with her strength (and the odd vampire bite). She even sits astride on one of the bulls. In another passionate scene, with a powerful and upright bull and Madonna hanging from him, they make love – though it is not clear whether they enjoy the moment. Later, Madonna kills the men/bulls (who are no longer wearing masks) one by one, beating them and strangling them as she gazes into their eyes. At the end of the video, Madonna, surrounded by corpses, holds the horns of one of the bulls and receives the applause of the audience. The video closes with the quotation by Nietzsche that we mentioned in our Introduction. The song, in the first person, tells the story of how the woman is not going to allow herself to be defeated by the break-up of a relationship in which the man had spun his web to trick her, and how despite falling into the trap, she is able to recover and move on.

The sexual and affective relationship is symbolic during most of the video but becomes tangible through sex at a certain moment. It is portrayed in the context of masculine–feminine antagonism and with a tension that can only be resolved by violence, which is presented aesthetically. Although this violence leads to the destruction of every man in the video (only Madonna survives), the visual scenes beautify this aggression, portraying a violence that is both intense and attractive. Madonna rejects her role of victim, setting herself up as

an avenger and displaying an image of transgression and empowerment. As in 'What It Feels Like for a Girl' (2001) and 'Give Me All Your Luvin' (2012), the violence is directed towards men in general. This could be interpreted as an attack on male dominance and, therefore, on patriarchy. This same resource has been used by other female artists such as Lady Gaga, Rihanna and Christina Aguilera, who have also addressed men with violence (Tortajada 2013). As authors such as Inness (2004) and Agirre (2012) have affirmed, this violent female figure has become the norm in mainstream culture, which seems not to get enough of it (Inness 2004). Moreover, as we can see in the above music videos, the women are violent because they choose to be (Agirre 2012).

In dressing and behaving like a bullfighter, Madonna occupies and appropriates the masculine space, as she did in the famous 'Express Yourself' (1989) video. However, the bullfighter's costume is not her only attire in this video: in several scenes she is wearing a swimsuit and unties her hair. This is in keeping with her tendency to perform from the pornographic perspective (Jhally 1995) and responds to the stereotype of the tough, attractive, slim, heterosexual and sexually attractive woman (Inness 2004). Moreover, her appearance responds to the standards of a music culture that is focused on youth.

Eroticism and violence are interrelated in this video as domination, death, sex and a sexualized feminine image are interwoven again and again during the narration. Violence is justified by the danger posed by the bull-men, who are seen as aggressive, strong and disturbing. Madonna reconfigures rape-revenge, becoming a righteous executioner who makes men pay for what they supposedly have done. She shifts her image between the stereotypical pornochic heroine and a woman who remains undaunted when entering spaces of power. However, by acting cruelly, adopting an ambiguous position and choosing the bullfighting metaphor, she de-politicizes the feminist discourse on rape-revenge, draining it of content. One might therefore wonder whether these performances by the artist are political acts of protest or rather controversial provocations of feminism.

CONCLUSIONS

From a culturalist perspective, Madonna's videos may be interpreted as a vehicle of protest and controversy since she encourages experimentation with identity while reinforcing the norms of the consumer society (Kellner 2003). She has been championed by the academic world as a hugely important artist for demonstrating how femininity is a 'masquerade' or performance. The artist puts on one mask after the other and plays with the usual symbols of gender, of which femininity is but one (Gauntlett 2008). However, this *mise-en-scène* could also be interpreted as an instrumentalization of feminism: by adopting the language of girl power, it ends up speaking for women while feminism itself is replaced by the imposition of dynamism, modernity and innovation onto products that are sold as mainstream feminist. This 'popular' feminism de-politicizes and replaces its earlier form in an attempt to return to patriarchy, hiding behind celebrations of feminine liberty (McRobbie 2008).

The characterization of femininity in Madonna's music videos in a timespan of over three decades reveals a transition towards figures that become progressively more active in using physical violence. The artist presents no alternative representation scheme and her performances shift between male and female and between victim and executioner. The only change is in the position of the artist as she plays the part of woman-executioner, thus inverting typical

masculine and feminine roles. Madonna uses violence as a provocation and narrative resource to take control of her relationship with men.

The tough woman, the phallic heroine and the sexy avenger replace the innocent girl, the *femme fatale*, the wife and the long-suffering mother. In her latest videos, sensuality – always present in Madonna's performance – is linked to violence. When exerting this violence, Madonna dresses in a masculine but sexy way and adopts certain masculine gestures (the bullfighter costume in 'Living for Love' and her overalls in 'What it Feels Like for a Girl'). Alternatively, violence is presented in a highly sexualized way (as in 'Gang Bang') without losing any of its aggressiveness. Madonna, therefore, is an attractive and cruel aggressor who kills using weapons, other artefacts and even her bare hands ('Living for Love').

The debate on the significance of this violence is still open. Some authors believe it creates spaces for emancipation inasmuch as it transgresses social norms and established roles for men's and women's bodies (Tung 2004). Other authors (Gill 2008), believe that although the violence committed by women can produce pleasure in female audiences, when this violence is decontextualized it becomes a form of gratuitous eroticized cruelty, cultivating a polarized notion of gender that only serves to maintain the battle of the sexes rather than to redefine the relationships between men and women. There is something specifically contradictory in the abundant representations of aggressive women over the last decade (Gill 2008; McRobbie 2005): while women appropriate traditionally masculine features – such as the use of violence – they also reify the classical codes of femininity through sexualization and cosmeticism (Gill 2009b; Lazar 2009).

This representation pattern, whereby female artists are portrayed as sexy, heterosexual female executioners or avengers, is void of transformative or liberating elements. Instead, it reinforces a sexist representation system that promotes classical binarisms, the battle of the sexes, and the link between violence and sexuality. For this reason, we must wonder once again whether these performances are not actually a backlash rather than an evolution of feminism.

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Shifting gender gaps in journalism? A longitudinal study on gender segregation in a converging media environment

ABSTRACT

This study explores whether recent technological changes in journalism have confirmed traditional gender segregation or created new gender divides. Our first research question focuses on the representation of male and female journalists in online and cross-media journalism that has emerged in the increasingly converged media landscape. Our second question looks at digital tools and explores whether social media are used differently by male and female journalists. In five-year intervals, we conducted a longitudinal survey (2003, 2008, 2013) in which all active journalists in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium were invited to participate. The response rate was 45% in 2003 (1026 journalists), 31% in 2008 (682 journalists) and 33% in 2013 (751 journalists). Our findings show that women are underrepresented in online and cross-media journalism: female journalists work for fewer websites compared to male journalists and produce less content for different media sectors. The traditional forms of gender segregation were reflected in online journalism. Female journalists also used fewer microblogs, such as Twitter, to disseminate information.

KEYWORDS

gender inequality
gender segregation
journalism practice
online journalism
social media
longitudinal survey

INTRODUCTION

In the past few decades, rapid technological innovations and changes in economic circumstances have stimulated profound transitions in the media industry. Digitization resulted in the convergence of media platforms (García Avilés and Carvajal 2008; Domingo et al. 2007; Erdal 2007; Pavlik and McIntosh 2004). In terms of working conditions, ample studies have documented that journalists need to produce more content in less time and with fewer resources (Bromley 1997; Quinn 2007; Singer 2004). It has repeatedly been demonstrated that the intensified work regime combined with the arrival of digital technologies results in an increased demand for multi-skilled journalists who can produce content for print, audio-visual and online platforms (Aldridge and Evetts 2003; Hermans et al. 2009; Quinn and Filak 2005; Vergeer et al. 2011).

Even though scholars agree that men and women have different working experiences in the profession, the impact of the changing journalistic work setting and digitization is rarely studied from a gender perspective. To date, research on gender inequality in journalism has uncovered several barriers for female journalists (e.g., the incompatibility of journalism and motherhood, the glass ceiling, sexism), but few studies have adopted a longitudinal perspective with respect to the changing media environment and recent technological advances. The aim of this article is to fill this gap by examining the representation of male and female journalists in online and cross-media journalism and in their use of social media. We address these research questions through a longitudinal survey of journalists in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium. The survey was distributed three times, with a five-year interval between each distribution (2003-2008-2013). All active professional journalists were invited to participate in the survey, which aimed to sketch the profiles of Dutch-speaking journalists in Belgium, while focusing on various work-related aspects such as education, job satisfaction, autonomy and the use of sources. The questionnaire was inspired by similar profile studies of journalists conducted by David Weaver and his colleagues in the United States (Weaver and Wilhoit 1986, 1996; Weaver et al. 2007). All three samples were representative of the entire population in terms of gender and age. The response rate was 45 per cent in 2003 (1026 journalists), 31 per cent in 2008 (682 journalists) and 33 per cent in 2013 (751 journalists). Respondents could complete the questionnaire either online or via a paper version that was distributed with the monthly magazine of the professional organization of journalists in Flanders.

The article is structured as follows: in order to frame the context for our subsequent discussion, the first section provides a review of the literature on the impact of recent technological innovations in journalism and stresses the importance of looking at these changes from a gender perspective. Subsequently, this perspective will be applied to changes in Flemish professional journalism. By doing so, this study has the potential to offer an increased understanding of the future challenges and possibilities in relation to gender issues in journalism.

A NEW TYPE OF JOURNALISM?

When studying the way in which digitization has impacted and changed journalism, Bardoel (1997) differentiated between internal and external automation. Internal automation refers to the technological changes in the

production process that influence the journalists' routines; an example of this is computer-assisted reporting, which includes the use of social media during news reporting. External automation implies the arrival of new information products that can lead to new professional practices. In journalism, digitization has not only amplified the convergence of existing media platforms such as newspapers, television and radio but also made possible the emergence of media channels in the online environment (García Avilés and Carvajal 2008; Davies 2008; De Bens and Raeymaeckers 2010; Deuze 2004; Erdal 2007; Pavlik and McIntosh 2004; Singer 2004). Internet technology has led to the rise of online media and the development of online journalism. Traditional media companies began to distribute a considerable amount of their content on news websites (Byerly 2013; Saltzis and Dickinson 2007).

This created an academic debate on whether journalism practiced online should be theorized as a new, separate type of journalism (Deuze 2007; Deuze and Dimoudi 2002; Deuze and Paulussen 2002). Deuze et al. (2004), for example, describe online journalism as a 'fourth' kind of journalism alongside print, radio and television journalism. Pavlik (2001) highlighted several unique characteristics based on how online journalism distinguishes itself from traditional journalism, such as interactive or multimedia content and content customization. In addition to this, scholars have studied the characteristics and work practices of online journalists. Deuze and Dimoudi (2002: 88) defined online journalists as 'those media professionals who are directly responsible for the Internet content of news ventures (be it existing print or broadcast media or be it independent online ventures)'. These authors emphasize that online journalists are often an autonomous and isolated group in newsrooms. According to Deuze (2009), this isolation leads to the development of micro-cultures in online newsrooms, which means that in some cases they consist of countercultural departments within the profession, and thus with their own values, ideals and practices. Pavlik (2001) adds that the structure of online newsrooms is less centralized and more flexible, with more freelancers than a traditional newsroom. In addition, working conditions differ between online and traditional journalism. The introduction of online technologies has increased real-time capabilities and created a need for a non-stop, 24/7-news cycle (MacGregor 1997; McNair 1998; Ottosen and Krumsvik 2012; Pavlik and McIntosh 2004; Reinardy 2011; Tsui 2009; Witschge and Nygren 2009). The flow of news in online journalism is continuous and immediacy is key in the competition for clicks on news websites (Hall 2001). Consequently, online journalists do not work under deadlines but gather and disseminate news in real time, meaning that they perform under extensive time pressure (Paulussen 2004). Singer et al. (1999) found that online news managers have the feeling that these intense time constraints make their job more difficult than it is for managers in traditional media. Moreover, according to these authors, most online teams are small and consist on average of only three or four people, which leads to a higher workload and longer working hours in these departments. At the same time, employers are expecting that online journalists are technically skilled and remain up-to-date with the latest digital innovations. Although these studies suggest that online journalism is more demanding than in traditional journalism, this is not reflected in the status of this professional group. In general, online journalists earn less, are positioned lower on the hierarchical ladder and are not taken seriously by their colleagues in traditional print journalism.

GENDER ISSUES IN ONLINE JOURNALISM

Feminist media scholars have widely documented gender issues in traditional journalism. These studies indicate that, even though female students make up the majority in journalism education and the number of female journalists has been increasing, journalism is still gender-segregated and female journalists are overrepresented in positions, media sectors and news beats that are associated with low levels of power and prestige (Byerly and Ross 2006; Demoor et al. 2000; Djerf-Pierre 2005; EIGE 2013; Löfgren-Nilsson 2010; Melin 2008; Ross 2001).

Although online journalism has become a popular research topic, few studies have focused on how male and female journalists are represented in this new sphere. Shayla Thiel (2004) is one of the few researchers who emphasized the importance of studying how gender plays a role in this constantly evolving new medium. Her research shows that even though female journalists had a positive view on their career opportunities in online journalism, the most powerful positions were male dominated. To date, researchers differ in their opinions on the position of women in online journalism. Chambers et al. (2004) state that online journalism can offer an opportunity for female journalists to overcome the work-life balance obstacle because the work schedules are often fixed and predictable. Franks (2013) agrees and adds that online and new media might offer possibilities for women that are not as office-based as traditional jobs. Several studies, though, are less optimistic. Carolyn Byerly (2013) notes that it is still difficult to make a living through online journalism as most of the work is done on a part-time or freelance basis. Furthermore, survey research in Belgium and the Netherlands indicates that women are underrepresented in the online journalistic ranks (Deuze & Paulussen 2002). At an international level, the results of the Global Media Monitoring Project in 2010 indicate that only 36 per cent of the stories that are produced online are by women (WACC 2010). Studies have also shown that few women make it to the top level of online media management (Poindexter 2008; Poynter 2013). In addition, researchers note that digital journalism is also horizontally segregated along gender lines. A study of Goa and Martin-Kratzer (2011), for example, showed that the choice of subjects by male and female journalists' blogs reflects the traditional gender divide in news topics. Women report more heavily on human-interest and health news stories associated with low-status populations, whereas men report more on political issues associated with high-status populations. Female bloggers also included more information about their family and their private life. These authors concluded that traditional gender roles in society were echoed in the blogosphere.

DIGITAL TOOLS AND RESOURCES

In addition to creating new forms of journalism, technological innovations in the media industry have altered the journalistic process. On the one hand, ample studies have shown that these innovations have provided new journalistic tools for gathering and disseminating news. Social media, for example, can be used to consult a wide variety of sources, check facts and build a network (Pavlik 2001). Social media can also be used as a tool for personal branding. Creating a personal brand on social media has advantages for journalists at different levels. It allows journalists to build credibility by being transparent, and increase their visibility and interactions with audiences (Bogaerts 2011; Chu 2012). Hedman and Djerf-Pierre (2014), for

example, emphasize that if a journalist has many followers on Twitter and is re-tweeted by the right person, this enhances the journalist's social capital in the professional field. According to Singer (2005), social media offers a new arena for journalists to display their professional identities and norms. On the other hand, the social media hype puts pressure on journalists to be online 24/7 (Hedman and Djerf-Pierre 2014). Journalists tweet about their daily work and their private lives, which implies that the lines between a journalist's private and professional life are blurring (Lasorsa 2012; Williams et al. 2010).

Few studies have examined whether male and female journalists have responded differently to the introduction of these digital tools in newsrooms. On the one hand, some authors have described possible advantages for female journalists in relation to these digital tools. According to Franks (2013), new media outlets offer possibilities for women to brand themselves, for example, on social networks and blogs. She notes that journalism has been reinvented through social networking and new media platforms and that this has given many women a whole new life outside the more traditional frameworks. Furthermore, Gao and Martin-Kratzer (2011) state that the Internet could possibly be an opportunity for women to gain more equality in the media industry, specifically via the use of technologies such as hyperlinks, multimedia and comment sections that allow journalists to reach out to audiences. These authors have shown that female journalists who are active on journalistic blogs interact more with readers than their male j-bloggers. On the other hand, these new media outlets could have important downsides for women. Franks notes that many female journalists who leave traditional newsroom jobs to work for social media platforms feel as if 'they are entering an electronic cage with increased pressures, rather than enjoying a more congenial life in the freelance electronic cottage' (2013: 45). Another dark side of social media is that female journalists are confronted with negative remarks and online harassment more often than their male colleagues (Barton and Storm 2014). Because women feel threatened online, they are more reluctant than men to write about sensitive topics. Furthermore, several authors assume that the blurring of boundaries between professional and private life by social media could have negative consequences for their work-life balance, especially for female journalists who are often already struggling to combine their work and family lives (Janes 2011).

METHODOLOGY

We conducted a large-scale survey of Dutch-speaking journalists in Belgium to answer two central questions: how are male and female journalists represented in online journalism and cross-media journalism? Are social media used differently by male and female journalists? In five-year intervals, we invited all active, professional Flemish journalists to take part in our survey. The title of professional journalist is protected by Belgian law and is assigned based on a number of conditions. In order to be recognized as a professional journalist, one must have 'journalist' as their primary occupation for a minimum of two years. To invite journalists to participate in our survey, we used a database from the Flemish professional journalists organization. The survey was administered online from 20 December 2012 until 7 February 2013. The respondents could choose to complete the questionnaire either online or via

hardcopy. The questionnaire is based on similar profile studies with journalists, for example studies conducted by David Weaver and his colleagues (Weaver and Wilhoit 1986, 1996; Weaver et al. 2007), which increases the longitudinal and international comparability of the data. The questionnaire comprises 62 questions divided into ten modules covering various aspects of journalism: education, career development, work situation, journalistic tasks, salary and job satisfaction, use of sources, autonomy, professional and political ideological opinions. The questionnaire was pretested several times in order to increase the reliability of the survey instrument. All of the samples were representative of the entire population in terms of gender and age. The response rate was 45% in 2003 (1026 journalists), 31% in 2008 (682 journalists) and 33% in 2013 (751 journalists). The statistical analyses were conducted with the SPSS software programme and the significance tests were conducted with a reliability level of $p \leq 0.05$.

RESULTS

Online journalism

The analyses differentiate between journalists who work for the website of a traditional medium and Internet-only journalists, defined as those who primarily work for independent online platforms that are not related to a newspaper, magazine, broadcasting corporation or press agency. The results of the survey show that only two per cent of the journalists described working for an Internet-only platform as their main professional activity. The cross-tabulation of sex with media sector, as illustrated in Figure 1, shows that women are least represented among Internet-only journalists compared with all other media sectors. Only 15 per cent of the respondents who indicated that they primarily work in this sector were female.

The analysis looked at the male-to-female ratio in online journalism in general, defined as journalists who work primarily for an Internet-only platform and journalists who pointed out that they frequently work for the website of a traditional medium. The number of online journalists was substantially higher than the number of Internet-only journalists. Thirteen per cent of respondents could be considered online journalists. The cross-tabulation of this variable with sex shows a pattern similar to Internet-only journalism. The survey of 2013 shows that 22% of the online journalists were women. Although this underrepresentation of women is not as strong as in Internet-only journalism, Figure 2 demonstrates that, compared to all other media sectors, this is still the second lowest level of female participation.

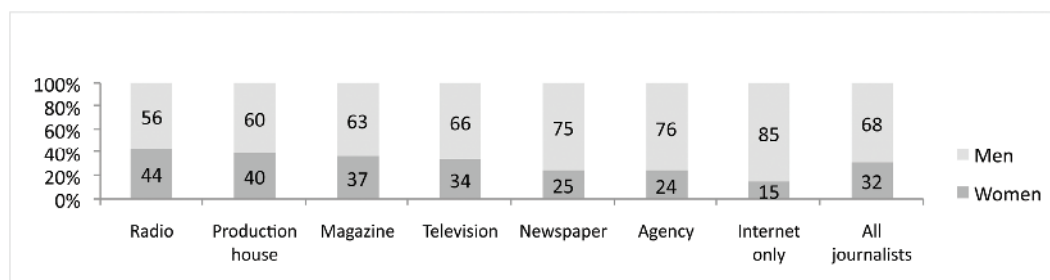


Figure 1: Male-female ratio by media sectors (Internet-only).

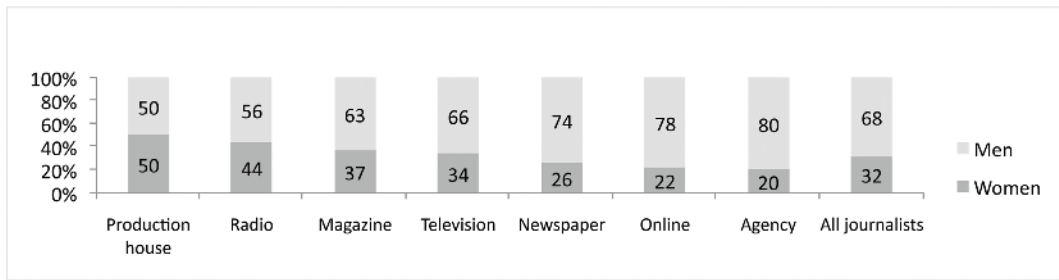


Figure 2: Male-female ratio by media sectors (online journalism in general).

The next step in the analysis was to focus on the frequency of Flemish professional journalists producing content for the website of a traditional medium. The survey indicates that 27% of the respondents work (almost) daily for the website of a traditional medium, 15% weekly, 14% monthly, 15% less than monthly and 30% never. The discrepancy between male and female journalists still holds when we look at online activity. The percentage of female journalists (36%) who indicate that they never work for the website of a traditional medium was significantly higher than the percentage of the male journalists (27%) ($p < 0.05$).

The longitudinal analysis also provides interesting insights. The percentage of journalists who indicate that they are professionally involved in online activities increased from 4% in 2003 and 10% in 2008 to 16% in 2013. Further analysis shows that the gender gap in online activities has also increased in the past ten years. In 2003, an equal percentage of male and female journalists indicated that they work online (4%); in 2008, the gender gap appeared and 12% of male journalists indicated that they work online compared to 5% of the female journalists ($p < 0.001$). Five years later, this discrepancy remained constant: 18% of male journalists worked for the Internet compared to 11% of female journalists ($p < 0.05$). The survey also indicates that the representation of women in decision-making positions in online journalism is significantly lower than that in traditional journalism. Figure 3 demonstrates that the decision-making level consists of only 9% of women in online journalism, whereas in traditional journalism women had reached a representation of 28% at the top level ($p < 0.001$). These findings

| Decision-making level | # Men | % Men | # Women | % Women |
|-----------------------|-------|-------|---------|---------|
| Newspaper | 32 | 80 | 8 | 20 |
| Magazine | 13 | 48 | 14 | 52 |
| Television | 17 | 85 | 3 | 15 |
| Radio | 8 | 52 | 7 | 48 |
| Internet | 21 | 91 | 2 | 9 |
| Press or photo agency | 0 | 0 | 1 | 100 |
| Total | 91 | 72 | 36 | 28 |

Figure 3: Male-female ratio in decision-making positions by media sectors.

| Subject areas | Traditional journalism | | Online journalism | |
|---------------------------|------------------------|-------|-------------------|-------|
| | Men | Women | Men | Women |
| Politics | 22 | 12 | 33 | 14 |
| Economics and finance | 18 | 8 | 25 | 21 |
| Religion | 5 | 3 | 2 | 0 |
| Sports | 23 | 6 | 25 | 0 |
| Media | 13 | 8 | 21 | 14 |
| Technology | 8 | 3 | 11 | 7 |
| Transport | 4 | 1 | 12 | 0 |
| Fait divers | 11 | 11 | 9 | 7 |
| No specialization | 19 | 24 | 14 | 26 |
| Domestic news | 16 | 19 | 16 | 29 |
| Society | 11 | 21 | 5 | 21 |
| Health | 2 | 15 | 7 | 14 |
| Tourism | 4 | 11 | 5 | 7 |
| Justice | 8 | 8 | 12 | 21 |
| Lifestyle | 5 | 29 | 7 | 14 |
| Foreign news | 18 | 15 | 12 | 36 |
| Local news | 23 | 19 | 21 | 29 |
| Social policy | 7 | 8 | 18 | 14 |
| Culture | 21 | 26 | 25 | 21 |
| Celebrity's and royalty's | 6 | 5 | 4 | 14 |
| Science | 4 | 8 | 7 | 0 |
| Education | 3 | 2 | 2 | 7 |
| Nature, environment | 5 | 4 | 2 | 7 |

Figure 4: Subject areas covered by men and women (in %).

suggest that vertical gender segregation is more pronounced in online journalism.

Second, we compared the division of news topics based on gender to study whether online journalism is characterized by horizontal segregation. We asked the respondents to indicate whether they were specialized in certain news beats. The survey offered a list of 22 news beats and included the category 'Other' for topics that did not fit within the given categories. In general, our findings show that both online journalism and traditional journalism are horizontally segregated based on gender. The analysis revealed differences in some of the specializations of male and female journalists between online and traditional journalism (see Figure 4). The overrepresentation of male journalists in political reporting and in technology was smaller in online journalism, whereas the overrepresentation of male journalists for topics related to economics and finance, sports, transport, media and *faits divers* was larger in traditional journalism. Furthermore, the data show that the overrepresentation of women in soft topics such as tourism, health and lifestyle was less pronounced in online journalism, whereas the overrepresentation of women was more pronounced in domestic news, news about society, news about

justice and in the group of journalists that indicated that they do not have a specialization. In addition, the gender divisions for certain topics were reversed in the online sphere. In online journalism women were overrepresented in foreign news, local news, news about celebrities and royalty, news about education and news about nature and the environment, whereas they were less specialized in these topics than their male counterparts in traditional journalism. Male journalists were dominant in social policy, culture and science in online journalism, whereas they were less specialized in these topics than their female counterparts in traditional journalism.

Cross-media and multimedia journalism

Journalists who produce content for different media platforms are highly valued in today's converging media market, and the data show that the respondents are aware of this. The surveys asked the respondents to rate, using a five-point Likert scale (1=completely disagree, 5=completely agree), whether they agreed with the statement that journalists have to be able to work for different media sectors and platforms. The results show that the percentage of journalists who (completely) agreed with this statement increased from 67% in 2008 to 80% in 2013. The data indicate that there is a difference between men's and women's opinions of the importance of cross-media and multimedia journalism. In 2013, 86% of the female journalists indicated that working for different platforms and media sectors is important, whereas only 77% of the male journalists agreed. These findings suggest that female journalists are more aware of the importance of cross-media and multimedia production than their male counterparts. However, further analysis on the number of media sectors in which the journalists work shows that only a small group of respondents put their ideas into practice. The 2013 survey data demonstrate that the majority of the respondents work for one media sector (69%). The longitudinal analysis, as presented in Figure 5, reveals that the percentage of the journalists who combine professional activities in multiple media sectors has increased over the last ten years (from 21% in 2003 to 29% in 2008 to 31% in 2013).

There was a larger discrepancy between the opinions and the practices of female journalists. Although the previous data indicate that women accord more importance to cross-media production, they work less in different media sectors (23%) than their male counterparts (34%) ($p < 0.01$). The comparison between the two surveys shows that this gender gap has increased over the past ten years: in 2003, 22% of the men indicated that they work in cross-media journalism compared to 18% of the women; in 2008, this was 31% of the men compared to 23% of the women ($p < 0.05$). The percentage of women who work in cross-media journalism has stagnated in the last five years and women are lagging behind in terms of cross-media journalism.

| | Men | Women | Average |
|------|-----|-------|---------|
| 2003 | 22 | 18 | 21 |
| 2008 | 31 | 23 | 29 |
| 2013 | 34 | 23 | 31 |

Figure 5: Cross-media journalism divided by sex.

IMPORTANT SKILLS IN A CHANGING WORK ENVIRONMENT

The survey asked the respondents to indicate on the Likert scale the importance of nine journalistic skills. Figure 6 presents an overview of the results for journalists in general and divided by sex. Overall, the respondents accorded the most importance to traditional journalistic skills. The majority of the respondents thought that language skills (99%), social skills (96%) and critical skills (95%) are (very) important for journalists. Male and female journalists had similar opinions on the importance of these skills.

The analysis reveals several significant differences between men and women in the assessment of the importance of necessary digital and multimedia environment skills. Women journalists were significantly more convinced than male journalists ($p < 0.05$) of the importance of multimedia skills (82% vs 73%) and online research skills (95% vs 91%). We asked the respondents to mark which skills played a role in their recruitment: journalistic skills, technological skills, general knowledge, expertise, experience, age, flexibility, informal social networks, successful internship, successful exam and coincidence. The analysis reveals a significant difference in the assessment of the importance of technological skills between male and female journalists. One out of ten (11%) of the male journalists indicated that their technological skills played a role when they were hired, whereas only 3% of the female journalists agreed with this statement $p < 0.001$.

| | Men | Women | Total |
|-----------------------------|-----|-------|-------|
| Language skills | 99 | 99 | 99 |
| Social skills | 96 | 95 | 96 |
| Critical, analytical skills | 94 | 98 | 95 |
| Multimedia skills | 73 | 82 | 76 |
| Online research skills | 91 | 95 | 92 |
| Graphical skills | 21 | 19 | 20 |
| Data management skills | 48 | 49 | 49 |
| Statistical skills | 66 | 64 | 65 |
| Technological skills | 82 | 85 | 83 |

Figure 6: (Very) important journalistic skills according to men and women.

THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Regarding the use of digital tools in newsrooms, the survey focused mainly on the professional use of social media. We asked the respondents to indicate on a six-point Likert scale (1=never, 6=multiple times a day) how frequently they used social media to disseminate information. We included four types of social media – personal blogs, blogs of others, social network sites and microblogs – and an ‘Other’ category. In general, the analysis shows that social media have not yet been adopted as a common tool for disseminating information in newsrooms. A considerable percentage of the respondents indicated that they never use a personal blog (91%), blogs of other people (86%), microblogs (53%) or social network sites (36%) to spread information. Figure 7 shows the journalists’ social media usage in general and divided by

| | | Never | Less than monthly | Monthly | Weekly | (almost) Every day |
|----------------------|-------|-------|----------------------|---------|--------|-----------------------|
| Personal blog | Men | 90 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 3 |
| | Women | 93 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| | Total | 91 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| Blog of someone else | Men | 84 | 9 | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| | Women | 89 | 6 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| | Total | 86 | 8 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Microblogs | Men | 51 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 16 |
| | Women | 58 | 15 | 10 | 10 | 8 |
| | Total | 53 | 11 | 11 | 12 | 14 |
| Social network sites | Men | 39 | 16 | 14 | 14 | 17 |
| | Women | 31 | 21 | 19 | 18 | 12 |
| | Total | 37 | 18 | 16 | 15 | 15 |

Figure 7: The use of social media (in %).

sex. The analysis indicates that female journalists use social media less to disseminate information vs their male counterparts, although only one of the differences was statistically significant. Male journalists use microblogs significantly more than female journalists to spread information. The percentage of the male journalists (16%) who use microblogs daily to spread information is twice as high as that of female journalists (8%).

CONCLUSION

This article examined gender segregation and differences between male and female journalists in relation to recent technological changes in journalism. We developed a longitudinal survey to study how male and female journalists relate to the impact of internal and external automation (Bardoel 1997). Regarding external automation, we focused on online journalism; in terms of internal automation, we considered the use of social media by journalists. Our findings were mixed. First, our study puts the optimistic views of women's chances in online journalism into perspective. Our analysis shows that in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, online journalism did not create substantially more employment opportunities for women, nor did it exponentially enhance their career possibilities. On the contrary, the traditional forms of gender imbalance were, to a large extent, mirrored in online journalism. Our study confirms the underrepresentation of women in the journalistic ranks, which was pointed out in previous survey research in Belgium and The Netherlands (Deuze and Paulussen 2002) and in a worldwide content analysis (WACC 2010). Our analysis also indicates that women are struggling harder to enter online journalism compared to other media sectors. This is an important finding if we take into account that idea that online journalism is often a way for young journalists to enter the profession. In addition, women are also less represented at the decision-making level of

online journalism, which confirms the results of authors such as Chambers et al. (2004), Poindexter (2008) and Poynter (2013). The added value of our study lies in the longitudinal perspective, which indicates that the gender gaps in cross-media and online journalism are expanding. Although female journalists are underrepresented in online and cross-media journalism, they are paradoxically more aware of the importance of certain skills that are needed in a cross-media and online journalism than their male counterparts. This inconsistency could also be interpreted as a sign that women face more difficulties than men in expanding their trajectories into these types of journalism. Second, we also focus on the use of social media as a tool for disseminating information. The differences between male and female journalists in the use of this function are limited; the only significant difference is found in the use of microblogs in that male journalists are more active in spreading information on them. Our research data are merely descriptive, only allowing us to quantify the representation of women in online journalism and cross-media journalism. Qualitative interviews with male and female journalists could provide more insightful information about the meanings, motivations and strategies towards online journalism, and their use of digital tools.

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How to be a *choni*: Tutorial videos, class and gender in Spain's economic recession

ABSTRACT

This article examines the construction of the choni (chavette) character through ironic and popular beauty tutorials created by Spanish vloggers and their connection with the economic recession in Spain. Our main objective is to discover the use of gender, cultural and class markers in this process and their relation to the dynamics of self-construction and self-differentiation existent on YouTube. In order to identify these characteristics, we are going to use a semiotic and Foucauldian discourse analysis based on the cultural approach to the chav phenomenon in the United Kingdom. The findings from our research illustrate how the figure of the choni is defined by the process of racialization and sexualization and by a lack of cultural competence.

KEYWORDS

choni
chavette
YouTube
self-construction
beauty tutorial
social class

INTRODUCTION

In narratives about the economic crisis in the United Kingdom, the demonization of the figure of the chav as a working-class agent has attracted considerable interest due to its central position in the social, political and media discourses (Jones 2012). Furthermore, the investigation around the representation of the chav in the media and in digital forums has achieved some important contributions in the academic field of Cultural Studies in England,

but few researchers have addressed the problem of the young underclass from this perspective in Spain, where the rate of young unemployment is one of the highest inside Europe and where the share of youths neither in employment, education nor training (NEET) 'ranks near the top of the OECD, surpassed only in Mexico, Greece and Italy' (Álvarez 2015). The construction of the young Spanish 'ni-ni', the Spanish version of the NEET, in opposition to the young entrepreneur and based on their lack of employment and education is for Serrano and Martín (2017) part of a new work ethic, marked by the individualization of social problems and the redistribution of responsibilities also present in the State's employability programmes.

This specific area of Cultural Studies has been neglected to the point of the absence of a clear definition of the cultural stereotypes related to the young underclass, the feminine *choni* and the masculine *cani*. This lack of definition is offset by their omnipresence in the media through the lifestyle sections of the newspapers (Cerro 2014; Ríos 2014; Trapiello 2009), and especially in celebrity journalism through the figure of the 'Celebrity Chav' (Tyler and Bennett 2009) such as Belén Esteban, Ylenia Padilla, Oriana Marzoli and Amanda Rodríguez Morales. Perhaps the most privileged medium for this figure is television. The *choni* appears to be the perfect social stereotype for young underclass women created by the neo- and hyper-television era (Eco 1983; Scolari 2008) with their populist agenda of transforming the spectator in the spectacle through reality and talk shows. In this way, the *choni* became the protagonist of reality shows based upon the spectacularization of the social differences, as in *Las Joyas de la Corona* (2010, Spain: Zeppelin), a Spanish adaptation of *Flavor of Love: Charm School* (2007, USA: VH1), or as in *Princesas del barrio* (2011, Spain: Eyeworks Cuatrocabezas). The *choni* is also the female protagonist of TV shows focused on exploitation and moral condemnation of youth population, as in *Gandia Shore* (2012–2013, Spain: Magnolia TV) or *Mujeres y hombres y vice-versa* (2008–present, Spain: Bulldog Producciones). Her presence in fiction is relevant in TV series such as *Aída* (2005–2014, Spain: Globomedia) with the characters of Lore and Macu or in movies such as *Yo soy la Juani* (Bigas Luna, 2006). Amongst all these names, celebrity TV star Belen Esteban can be considered the queen of *chonis*, the only one to receive academic attention in the enlightening article by Mercè Oliva (2014). Oliva points out to a critical factor for this study when analysing fame as a disciplinary regime: 'There are striking similarities between the discourses of disgust aroused by Belén Esteban and those identified in the UK against working-class female celebrities' (2014: 450).

This article outlines an approximation similar to the study of the sexualization of young underclass women on social media used by Willem, Araüna and Tortajada (2015) focusing on their representation on YouTube through the use of tutorial videos. In this context, we tried to analyse how the image of the young underclass is gendered through ironic beauty tutorials and how these amateur representations collide with or participate in the mainstream images of the *choni*. This article is divided into three sections. The first section gives a brief overview of the most relevant studies in the United Kingdom about the figure of the chav and provides the analytical tools for the study of the figure of the *choni*. The second section examines the neo-liberal discourses that are present in the practice of YouTube self-representation, and the third section provides a deep analysis of the presented videos, focusing on the cultural aspects of class depiction and specifically on how young

underclass women are commodified and transformed in a lifestyle that can be purchased.

‘CHONISMO’: CLASS AS CONSUMPTION

As long as we consider the *choni* in the same way as these YouTubers do, as a young subcultural group, we are emphasizing the cultural aspects of class. In doing so, we are taking the analytical position of Lawler (2004), Skeggs (2004) and Hollingworth and Williams (2009), who pointed out that economic status is just one of the defining characteristics of class. This inclusion of social and cultural aspects of class is rooted in an array of contemporary theories, from Erving Goffman’s self-representation theory (1999), to Foucauldian biopower (2006), to sign negotiation (Hall 1996), to Bourdieu’s concept of habitus (1986a, 1990) and especially cultural capital (1986b). The cultural aspects of the notion of class are essential to the development of the English branch of Cultural Studies and especially to the work of Stuart Hall and the New Left. Particularly important for our analysis is Hall’s work, ‘A sense of classlessness’ (1958), in which he pointed out not only that popular culture can be a potential place of class resistance but also that culture can erode traditional class alliances. For the aims of our investigation, also central is the idea that ‘class may be grounded within and produced through people’s identities and cultural practices, rather than just their occupational backgrounds’ (Hollingworth and Williams 2009: 468) and also the affirmation of the sociologist Beverly Skeggs that ‘race and class are not just classification or social positions but an amalgam of features of a culture that are read onto bodies as personal dispositions’ (2004: 1). For this author, class is not a given condition but a continual production through different practices in a process ‘always made by and in the interests of those who have access to power and the circuits of symbolic distribution’ (2004: 2).

Skeggs’ definition of class formation and class assignation as a dynamic struggle fuelled by symbolic conflict and submitted to a process of ‘euphemistic transference’ (2004: 5) into objects, dress, behaviours, (gendered and sexed) bodies and other cultural and subcultural markers, such as music (Martinez 2007), is central to contemporary approaches to the *chav* phenomenon, due to the mechanisms of class displacement and individualization (Lawler 2004). For instance, Hollingworth and Williams in their study of the construction of working class youth as ‘others’ in three urban state schools of England, concluded that the class rhetoric is transferred to ‘music tastes and fashion tastes’ (2009: 470). Moreover, they identified the following class features in student discourses which fell into the othering and pathologization of their working-class peers:

Chavs were most commonly defined by their brash and excessive dress and appearance (aesthetic); their careless, unruly and often violent behaviour (performative); and, in the context of schooling, their lack of respect for and disengagement with education (moral).

(Hollingworth and Williams 2009: 473)

For Hollingworth and Williams the above characteristics are antithetical to the self-regulated, reflexive and autonomous neo-liberal subject, and serve to build an oppositional class place occupied by the middle-class students (normative subjects); but at the same time, their cultural and external

appearances seem linked to lifestyle discourses. Furthermore, these authors identified this consumerist turn as a mechanism aimed to reinforce the dogma of neo-liberal free will, related to personal election (of clothes, music) with a negative impact on education:

In some cases, chav was almost described as an identity that you can buy into [...] but at the same time you are not authentic unless you are proper poor, and, of course, it is not a lifestyle they would wish to buy into. The notion that this particular identity position is a choice allows for a 'blame the victim' discourse in which, if children choose to be a chav or a gangster, then it is essentially their own fault if they experience the educational consequences of this 'choice'.

(Hollingworth and Williams 2009: 477)

With the appearance of free will but working as a system of symbolic domination, another important aspect of the cultural and euphemistic transference of class is the fact that its main function is to 'impose fixity onto those from whom they [the powerful] draw and claim moral distance' (Skeggs 2004: 4). In other words: some people have the power to play with class references, for instance, mimicking the chav clothes, accent or attitudes, and some people become stuck in that social category.

In reference to the essential reconfiguration of the chav phenomenon as a lifestyle, we have to cite Imogen Tyler (2008), who saw in the social construction of the chav a concentration of 'a series of older stereotypes of the white poor' but with a new emphasis on conspicuous and cheap consumer habits. This idea is developed from Hayward and Yar (2006), who argued that the chav is a consumer-oriented classification, dependent on the withdrawal of working positions as class markers as a result of the crisis of Fordism, of state welfarism and the loss of employment security. Hayward and Yar consider that nowadays, especially amongst the youth population, consumption and having no occupation are crucial for class belonging. Consumption as a tool for self- and social recognition is also an instrument for pathologization, based on 'the *excessive* participation in forms of marked-oriented consumption which are deemed *aesthetically* impoverished' (2006: 14, original emphasis). For these authors, the signs of the chav's vulgar and excessive consumption aesthetic are their sportswear clothing with eye-catching brandings, their flashy jewellery, their accessories, their drinks and their cosmetics, in the form of 'excessive make up, sunbed tans'. These analysts argued that stressing the neo-liberal doctrine of individual choice connected to consumerism is a way not only to disguise social exclusion but to promote conspicuous consumption. Bennett (2013) offers a similar explanation, citing the expression of Bauman (1998) of 'choice incompetence', and linking this aspect with the privatization of the public discourse and with an attempt to depoliticize class differences. Bennett argues that supposed chav attributes 'articulate a semiotics of class while denying that this is about a class at all, saturating the social with personal meanings by recontextualizing public experience in such a way as to suggest that is ultimately the private that matter' (2013: 160).

Other branches of chav studies have focused research around the concept of disgust. For instance, Imogen Tyler (2008) has written extensively about the emotional factors of the construction of the social type of the teen pregnant chav mother across different media. There she explains how, in the context of a contemporary culture of consumption, disgust is used by middle-classes

to 're-demarcate class boundaries' (2008: 22) and block social mobility (2008: 32). Furthermore, for Tyler, the media presence of 'class-naming' is a sign of the obvious re-emergence of class discourses through comical or ironical stereotyping. Since class comedy is 'boundary-forming' and 'creates a distance between 'them' and 'us', disgust creating is not only reactive but 'constitutive of social class' (2008: 23), especially in a context as the United Kingdom where the class inequalities have been substantially increased. In a similar fashion, Jessica Ringrose and Valerie Walkerdine (2008) have studied the figure of the abject working woman in makeover TV shows who 'fails as subject/object of desire and consumption, and lacks requisite qualities of self-reflexivity necessary for reinvention' (2008: 228). In this type of reality-show, the working woman is a spectacle of 'physical abjection – disgust and fascination – through which subjects (ourselves and others) become constituted as failing' (2008: 235), in order to highlight personal blame and personal incompetence. Moreover, the show's dynamic of the transformation is never complete due to the absence of cultural, social or symbolic capital related to the middle-classes, but allows spectators to recognize class in these 'abject signals which we must not inhabit [...] must identify against' (2008: 240).

YOUTUBE: AUTHENTICITY, GENDER AND NEO-LIBERALISM

The video sharing platform YouTube is one of the most popular websites on the Internet with more than a billion users and 'each day those users watch a billion hours of video' (YouTube Press, 2017). Snickars and Vonderau (2009), in their analysis of YouTube, identify the tension between community and commerce as one of its main characteristic. This aspect is crucial to understanding debates around authenticity in this platform: amateur content is related to the genuineness of video-blogging (vlogging), while corporate content is related to the falseness of economically driven videos, especially music videos (Burgess and Green 2009; Duplantier 2016).

It has been reported (YouTube 2015) that amateur videos are among the most commented videos on YouTube, due to the mechanics of the gaze's interpellation directed to the camera, the conversational style, and, as Burgess and Green argue, 'the extensive "spreadability" of the ideas, styles and materials associated with YouTube's homegrown stars' (2009: 100). This view is complemented with Patricia G. Lange's (2009) notion of 'videos of affinity' directed 'to maintain feelings of connection with potential others who identify or interpellate themselves as intended viewers of the video' (2009: 71). These informal, personal and often banal kinds of videos are one recurrent tool to maintain an open and active communication with followers and to build an essential sense of grassroots community inside a participatory media like YouTube.

In the visual regime of YouTube, vlogging has achieved a particular domestic and amateur aesthetic and some basic productions values 'structured around a monologue delivered directly to camera' (Burgess and Green 2009: 94). Inside the web's participatory culture, the term tends to be used as a synonym of 'self-expression', with some aspects of the confessional culture inherited from reality TV and, related to youth audiences, with some aspects of visual production from inside the new media landscape of the 'bedroom culture' (Hodkinson and Lincoln 2008; Livingstone 2007). Even though not all vloggers make home-based videos, and despite the presence of a distinctive aesthetic, Burgess and Green argue that there is not such a clear demarcation between amateur and corporate uploaders, referring to 'entrepreneurial

vloggers' and pointing out that 'the possibilities of inauthentic authenticity are now a part of the cultural repertoire of YouTube' (2009: 95). In the same vein, Jenny Kidd (2016) in her book *Representation* notes that beauty vloggers on YouTube are 'a prime example of how authenticity, self-representation, consumerism and corporate interests are juxtaposed in the social mediascape' (2016: 70), pointing out that beauty vlogging is one of the most popular trends on YouTube.

In her case study of popularity markers in YouTube's attention economy, Florencia García-Rapp (2016: 2) claims that on YouTube, beauty content reached 1.6 billion views in March 2015, with more than 180,000 beauty gurus uploading more than 100 hours of content per day. Furthermore, according to Tianna Fischer (2014), four of the top 100 most subscribed channels on YouTube are beauty vlogs. Apart from this, García-Rapp stress the importance not only of the commercial aspect of beauty tutorials, but also their educational aspects, as there are ideologies of learning and the pedagogical values inherent to this kind of production. This expertise, defined as 'community-specific know-how', is shown in 'quick, easy-to-follow, music-laden, instructional videos' (2014: 10). For García-Rapp, beauty tutorials are a combination of pedagogical and performative or media aspects, teaching the dynamics of self-construction in an 'active reworking and updating of audience's identities' (2016: 14). On the other hand, Tianna Fischer adds another aspect to the equation of the beauty and fashion tutorials: the show. This refers to the spectacle involved in stressing the aesthetics qualities of everyday practices such as clothing or make-up. For Fischer, citing Lev Manovich, make-up and clothing are part of the industrial toolbox for personal 'bricolage, assembly, customization, and [...] remix' (2009: 322). In a similar way, Sandra Weber (Weber and Mitchell 2008), in discussing adolescence as a period of identity formation, largely confirms this point of view by talking about the digital production of the selfhood as 'identity-in-action'. This is a media process by which identities are 'constructed, deconstructed, shaped, tested, and experienced' (2008: 27) and in which 'the identities emerging through multimedia production retain traces of the original material' (2008: 39).

In sharp contrast with these postmodern perspectives, we can name classical Foucauldian analyses of techniques to curate the female body used in YouTube tutorials, such as that by Sandra Lee (1997), in which make-up is not a practice of self-expression but of self-discipline. This view of female self-disciplining beauty techniques that, as we suggest, we can find in YouTube tutorials is complemented by the extra surveillance suffered by women YouTubers. Lindsey Wotanis and Laurie McMillan (2014) have shown that 'surveillance, judgment, and evaluation' is suffered to a greater extent by female YouTubers than by male participants (2014: 191). The study carried out by Banet-Waiser (2011: 18) about post-feminism on girls' YouTube videos, shows that comments on this kind of media function 'more often than not as a neo-liberal disciplinary strategy, where videos are judged and gain value according to how well the girls producing them fit normative standards of femininity'.

The idea that neo-liberalism is central to the construction of online personalities is also present in the study of Brooke Erin Duffy and Emily Hund (2015) about fashion bloggers. In this article, the authors stressed the importance of self-branding, flexibility and informal knowledges for a post-Fordist economy of consumption, and claim that the form of self-creation and brand-laden promotion the fashion bloggers participate ensures that

they do not deviate too far from their traditional roles as consumer; in so doing, it privileges those with existing economic capital and/or individuals that conform to the aesthetic standards celebrated by mainstream media. These depictions of entrepreneurial femininity are thus inscribed within a culture that constructs women as feminine subjectivities, emotional labourers, and above all, consumers.

(2015: 9)

Talking about everyday practices on YouTube, Banet-Waiser points out that interactive technologies, especially those used by young girls, create a new tool for self-management through which new relationships between young people and corporations are created. This relationship is gendered and is related to post-feminism (McRobbie 2008) in the exercise of self-branding. The ideals of 'capability, empowerment, and imagination' encourage the self-branded girl 'to be a product within a neo-liberal context; she authorizes herself to be consumed through her own self-production' (2015: 11, original emphasis). Banet-Waiser argues that YouTube videos do not exist in a vacuum but in close relation to a series of cultural meanings that serve as a validating strategy of a saleable image. Supporting this hypothesis, Alison Hearn (2008: 198) claims that self-branding in social media 'involves the self-conscious construction of a meta-narrative and meta-image of self through the use of cultural meanings and images drawn from the narrative and visual codes of the mainstream culture industries'.

HOW TO BE A *CHONI*: VIDEO ANALYSIS

As we have seen in the previous paragraph, beauty or lifestyle tutorials on YouTube offer an opportunity to think critically about how authenticity is staged, how connections to a potential community are created, how consumerism is important for self-creation techniques and how gender is performed and scrutinized in its relation to the mainstream culture. However, one question that needs to be asked to understand the YouTube narratives around the *choni* is how class interacts with all these factors.

For this objective, we opted to apply textual and media analysis (McKee 2003; Bainbridge 2011) to a small but relevant sample of the most viewed YouTube videos related to the subject 'How to be a *choni*'. Our sample included videos by the vlogger Paatristras with 1,112,181 views, by the group of preteen vloggers called Vallintoners with 704,606 views, by the vlogger Sarahhijaputa with 159,978 views and a series by Atun Con Pepitas with 436,407 views for part I, 122,308 views for part II and 66,500 for part III (893,414 views in total). All these videos have common characteristics, such as being made by young women, being a parody of the beauty tutorials of YouTube and showing a precise and coincident portrait of the social stereotype of the *choni*. These YouTube productions are complemented with the video '*Gótica vs. Pija vs. Choni*' from the vlogger Rebel, not a beauty tutorial but a representation of the *chonis* as a youth subculture, with 670,288 views. We have also included three less relevant videos, '*La choni perfecta*' by Lorena Gonzalez, a conversational classification of the *choni* with 32,223 views, and the beauty tutorials of PaZz y Amor with 5850 views and Celia ontheworld with 4685 views, which are used to support different affirmations.

In order to identify the way in which class supports the creation of the *choni* character, we need to understand the YouTuber's use of class-based

cultural signs in the construction of this stereotype. We are of the opinion that these videos participate in the contemporary discourses of metaphorical class assignation in their avoidance of direct social naming and their transference to cultural and everyday signs (clothes and make-up). This classic semiotic approach is complemented with the sociological and cultural approach of Beverly Skeggs involving the notion of social belonging, and particularly with her studies about working class women and the 'moral euphemisms' (2005: 965) used to signal and demonize them, especially those related to the construction of the appearance. Skeggs (1997, 2004) noted that historically '*appearance became the signifier of conduct*; to look was to be. The construction of appearance became a cultural property of the person, the means by which women were categorized, know and placed by others' (2004: 99, original emphasis) being the main mechanism for authorization and de-legitimation.

It is interesting to note that the class and gender-based stereotype of the *choni* has become so fundamental to the Spanish conventional wisdom of the social differences that all the YouTubers employed the same collection of cultural features, a distinctive music, clothes or make-up, almost without variations. This replication can be linked to the reiterated process of Butler's gender performativity in *Bodies that matter* (1993), where repetition ensures an accurate designation in the production of bodies. For McRobbie, this performativity is understood as 'the reiterative power of discourse to bring into being what it names' (2005: 88). Granting existence to sexed bodies has a significant weight in the studies of girls' culture: 'Only by recognising oneself as a girl and taking up the space of designation as girl, can a culturally intelligible speaking subject emerge'. In our analysis, we have divided these repetitive cultural signs into three main categories based on significant schemes of symbolic classification: racialized signs, sexual signs and signs of cultural competence.

In the first place, we are going to analyse the signs that are codified as racial signifiers, namely, the signs connoting or conferring a particular conception of race. The practice of racialization is defined by Amy Ansell as the historical and constructivist 'processes whereby racial meaning is attributed to groups or social practices as a result of which racial hierarchies are constructed, maintained, or challenged' (2013: 217). The racial markers shown in these videos and employed in the construction of the *choni* take part of what Skeggs identifies as a historical tendency in which 'working-class women were frequently ethicized through assumed sexual profligacy and geographical association with diverse ethnic groups' (2004: 90). But, as Ann McClintock reminds us, the historical process of racialization 'through the equation of dirt, sexuality and blackness' has two main consequences: 'the working-class woman's body was racialized and the middle-class woman whitened' (in Wolkowitz 2001). Added to this, Imogen Tyler (2008: 25) in her study about chavs shows how the mechanisms of racialization and dirt are actively in use in our construction of class, making this sociological group visible: 'chavs are not invisible normative whites, but rather hyper-visible "filthy whites"'. For Tyler, this character of 'borderline whiteness' is evident in chav appropriation of black American popular culture 'through their clothing, music, and forms of speech' and having 'geographical, familial and sexual intimacy with working-class blacks and Asians and immigrant populations'. This view is supported by Bennet (2003: 149), who suggest that chavs are represented as a white subgroup trying to emulate 'black semiotics practices' in a conservative representational practice designed to diminish 'working-class multiculturalism'.

Interestingly, in our investigation we discover that racialization is also a feature of the cultural construction of the *choni* in its direct relationship to Latina and Romani stereotypes. In Veallintoner's video, the association of the *choni* with young Romani women is built through the use of the flamenco and the use of the word 'olé' (01:22). Similarly, in Atun con pepitas' video, *chonismo* is associated with dancing flamenco and listening to Camela, a famous Spanish pop group with Romani members (00:30, part III) but the association is also visible in the recommendation of using clothes from 'your father, your brother or the "payo"' – 'payo' is an untranslatable Romani term used to refer to non-Romanies¹ (00:05). In Sarahhijaputa's video, the connection with this sociological group is evident in her use of flamenco music and her affirmation that make-up can attract 'hottest gypsy guys'² (m01:16). In this video, the make-up tutorial is interrupted with mimicked gossip about a friend relating that 'the other day my friend "la Vane" met a really, really hot gypsy, you know [licking her fingers], ah, payo, with this gypsy I would do a lot of things'³ (04:17), making a clear and racialized connection between underclass women and Romani women. Another significant example of this racialization occurs in Rebel's video, when, in introducing the youth subcultures represented in the video – the gothic, the posh and the *choni* – one of the protagonists suffers a slip of the tongue and improperly announces that the video is going to represent a 'gitana', a 'gypsy'. In a similar fashion, the YouTuber Celia ontheworld, talking about the photographic pose of the 'duck face' in the pictures uploaded to social media, and especially those uploaded to Tuenti, explains that 'if you don't do the duck face you're a boring paya'⁴ (02:49). Tuenti, referred to as 'the Spanish Facebook' (Del Giudice et al. 2014: 18) is, according to an article by Garcia-Jimenez et al. (2013), the only significant class difference in the use of social media by Spaniards since it 'is the option most used by the lower class'.

All of these racial marks are appropriately read by the audiences who reflect, with the usual surveillance of women's bodies, their racial anxieties about this kind of representation. In the two most viewed and commented videos, that of Vallintoners (786 comments) and, paradoxically, that of Paatristras (4004 comments), which has no explicit reference to the Romani community, there are a vast number of comments relating *choni* fashion to young Romani woman. Some participants expressed that the YouTubers fall into the error of confusing *choni* with Romani, as commenter Juan Antonio Garcia Garcia posted on the Paatristras video, 'rather they are gypsies but do your own thing xD',⁵ or as Alba Diez Ibañez posted on the Vallintoners video, 'they aren't chonis, they are gypsies'.⁶ Others pointed to the social and geographical proximity between *chonis* and the Roma people (*gitanos*), especially in the south of Spain, reflecting how the discourses about racial contamination are still relevant. This can be seen in the sentiment endorsed by Alberto González Pueri in the Paatristras channel:

They tend to be miserable in the long run, since many of them end up marrying young, pregnant, without work or future. There are people who study and work to build a better future. But the Chonis with so much partying and so much gipsy-like partying, in the end it catches up with them, and they pay a very high price. In Andalusia they are more concentrated than anywhere else in Spain, or at least, that's what I've seen.⁷

This extreme Romanophobia and regional hate towards Andalusia is complemented by comments which point out that the semiotic practices of the *chonis*

1. 'tu padre, de tu hermano o del payooo'.
2. 'a los gitanos más guapos'.
3. 'el otro día mi amiga la Vane se encontró con un gitano muy guapo, muy guapo, o sea [se chupa los dedos] ay payo que yo con ese gitano haría muchas cosas'.
4. 'si no sales con morrito y con cabeza eres una paya aburría'.
5. 'eso mas bien es de gitanas pero tu a tu royo xD'.
6. 'eso no son chonis son gitanas'.
7. 'Suelen ser unas desgraciadas a la larga, ya que muchas terminan casándose jóvenes, embarazadas, sin trabajo ni futuro. Hay gente que estudia y trabaja para labrarse un futuro mejor. Pero las chonis con tanta fiesta y tanto gitaneo, al final les pasa factura, y eso tiene un precio muy alto. En Andalucía se concentran más que en cualquier lugar de España, o al menos, eso es lo que he visto'.

8. 'Los gitanos han empezadoo la modaa canii i chonii i nosotross los paos lees hemos copiado'.
9. 'Eso no es ser choni, estáis representando a las gitanas, y las estáis dejando en mal lugar en todo, así que primero de todo, si es algo dedicado a reírse, informaros bien y no comparéis con favoritismo, porque quien es choni lo es por que quiere, y según esto las estáis dejando en muy mal lugar. Tanto a las gitanas como a las chonis'.
10. 'esto no es ser chonis esto es como ser gitana. Los consejos estan mal y las chonis escuchan reggaeton o electronix y dejar de hacer el tonto q no daís ni puñetera gracia'.
11. 'Maquillaje, todo el bote, todo el bote... si te miran es bueno... no pasa nada si pareces un gnomo, tú bronceada, tú la mejor'.

have been co-opted from the Roma community, as Thelma Serra Vidal points out in her comment on the Paatristras video: 'The gypsieeeeees have starteeeee the cani and choni fashiooon, and we, the payos, we haaave copied them'.⁸ In far fewer instances comments can be found regarding the false assumption between *choni* and young Roma women, and the negative connotations of this association, as in one by J. D. Henar on the Vallintoners video:

That is not being a choni, you are representing the gypsies, and you are making them look bad in everything, so first of all, if it is something dedicated to laughing, first learn about it and do not compare with favouritism, because whoever is choni is so because she wants to, and according to this you are leaving them in very bad place. Both gypsies and chonis.⁹

There is also another kind of comment concerned with a particular mistake in the portrait of the *choni*: the use of music. As expressed by one comment signed by alexandra giosanu on the *Vallintoners* video, 'This is not being choni, this is like being gypsy. The advice is wrong: chonis listen to reggaeton or electronix, so stop making fools of ourselves cause you are not bloody funny'.¹⁰

This clarification is also useful in the way that it introduces another racialized factor, the vinculation of *chonis* with young Latinas, particularly in their use of music, reggaeton, and the kind of dance related to this music, *perreo*, which involves a type of movement marked by its sexual connotations. We can find cultural marks related to young Latinas in Paatristras' video (00:09) while dancing reggaeton music plays in the introduction of the video. Sarahhijaputa uses this kind of music profusely in her video and in the Rebel video the *choni* character speaks with a strange and thick Cuban accent and dances *perreo* spasmodically. These kinds of representations are consistent with the narrative of racial contamination, and reflect some trends in Spanish immigration in the feminization of the immigrant population, especially of Ecuadorans and Colombians (Saenz and Murga 2011: 74). It is also in line with the other media portrait of Latinas on American advertizing as a 'hypersexual, loud, aggressive and usually young' in a 'woman-as-a-panethnicity trope' (Báez 2009: 259).

Finally, there is another subtle racialized factor: the extensive use of make-up base in almost all of the seven videos included in this article, but in particular in those of PaZz y Amor (02:56), Sarahhijaputa (00:31), Atun Con Pepitas (08:09, part II) and Vallintoners (00:29), where the make-up is so disproportionate that its use may stain other people in a graphic image of racial contamination. Atun Con Pepitas is more extreme in her presentation because, playing with more parodic elements in relation to the construction of the *choni* but also in relation to tutorial beauty videos, the protagonist explains how to use make-up base to look like a proper young working-class woman with these terms: 'Make-up, the whole tin, the whole tin [...] if they look at you it's good [...] its OK if you look like a goblin, you look tanned, you're the best'.¹¹

The spontaneous and playful attitude, which is absent in the rest of videos, derives from the exaggeration of make-up application and results in a kind of 'black-faced' social class where this caricature is taken to the extreme (00:30 part III). By doing so, the YouTuber shows the prevalence of the category of the abject body in the construction of working-class women stereotypes.



Figure 1: *Atun con pepitas* (2011), 'Cómo ser la choni perfecta 3/3', Youtube.

Next, we analyse the display of sexual markers in our collection of videos and we are going to subdivide them into three categories: body language, clothing and sexual narratives.

Body language, as a key factor of appearance, is the privileged arena for linking young working-class women with excess and sexuality. Skeggs (2005: 99) notes that the mere attention to one's appearance is seen as sign of 'sexuality in excess', and, in a Foucauldian way, Kathleen Rowe points that 'social groups exercise control over their members by inscribing standards of beauty and perfection, of social and sexual "normalcy," on their bodies' (1995: 62). This raises the question of whether body language is defined by its relationship to the social group. For Rowe, the categories applied to distinct body language categories are interconnected with positions of power: among the powerful, relaxation means 'ease', but for those in need of social control it means 'looseness' or 'sloppiness'. For Rowe, the body that refuses to be aestheticized is grotesque and offensive, and can 'communicate resistance to social discipline' and among this opposition 'women of ill-repute, whether fat or thin, are described as "loose", their bodies, especially their sexuality, seen as out of control'. In addition to this, Rowe explains that the body of working-class women is related in the social narratives of the powerful with the realm of bodily functions, the body's expulsions and leakages, signifying 'lack of discipline and self-control' (Skeggs 2004: 102) and more generally with an excess of bodily materiality.

In accordance with these theories, the main tools for communicating sexual excess through the body in these videos are the sexualized positions and dance in the video by Paatristras (00:11) the display of her cleavage (01:55). The out-of-control sexual dance in the Rebel video (02:11) and the body positions in that of *Atun Con Pepitas* (particularly 01:13, part II and 01:46, part III). Along with these descriptions there is another surprising factor in the construction of the sexual excess of the *choni*: open-mouth chewing. We can find this item in the Vallintoners video (01:56), in the Rebel video (00:10), in the Lorena Gonzalez video (02:32) and in the Paatristras video (01:22). In the latter two videos, the YouTubers connect this habit directly with prostitution. Paatristras notes that 'another very important thing is the chewing gum [...]

12. 'Otra cosa muy importante es el chicle [...] esto es similar a las putas'.
13. 'Y el chicle en la boca... eso que es similar a las putas, pero no importa'.
14. 'Muy sexy así vienen muchos chicos a por mí [...] ¿entiendes? Eso es lo importante... que todos los tíos vengan hacia mí... para eso ves el video, para aprender a que todos los tíos vayan hacia ti y así tienes tracatracatra [...]'

this is similar to the whores',¹² and Lorena Gonzalez points that 'And the gum in the mouth [...] that's similar to whores, but it does not matter'.¹³ This relation is not only based in the metaphorical proximity of the voracious women's mouth with sexuality (Bordo 2000) but has historical roots in the history of chewing gum, the *tzictli*, which was only chewed in public by the prostitutes (Vázquez 1999), showing that the contemporary construction of the body as a symbol of class has enigmatic historical sources.

Clothing is another definitive factor in the construction of the body of the *choni* as sexually unruly, as long as 'objects of clothing became invested with intangible and abstract elements of the moral and social order' (Skeggs 2005: 99). For these YouTubers, the clothing selection of the *choni* represents her sexual availability in their use of bare-midriff, tight or low-cut blouses or pants, spandex or spaghetti strap. These are pieces of clothing that are sexually charged in the way they expose and do not hide the body. This kind of description is used in the Paatristras video (00:18) in the context of talking about a T-shirt that shows the *lorzas*, a word that can be translated as 'pin tucks' but in its popular use is more related to 'fat roll', denoting a fat body out of control. Paatristras also talks about the necessity of revealing sexy underwear, meaning the thread thong underwear or the bra (01:55). We can find recommendations of shorts, tank tops or underwear in almost all the videos. Another factor found in all the videos of our study involved sexualizing subjects through the wardrobe is the use of animal print, an aesthetic election that we can analyse in relation to the racialization process. Several studies have shown that, for instance, the use of animal print in advertizing that features African American women reinforces the stereotype that they 'are animalistic in nature, sexually active, less educated, have lower income, and extremely concerned with personal appearances' (Scott and Dominique 1997).

These basic elements of representation are complemented only in Sarahhijaputa's video with a sexual narrative to emphasize the sexual promiscuity of the *choni*, the only one found in our collection. Talking about the effects of her make-up the vlogger relates:

Very sexy so many guys come to me [...] do you understand? That's the important thing [...] that all the guys come to me [...] that is why you watch the video, to learn how to attract all the guys and have tracatracatra [...].¹⁴

(07:10)

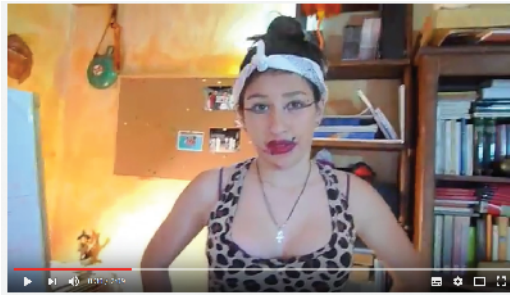
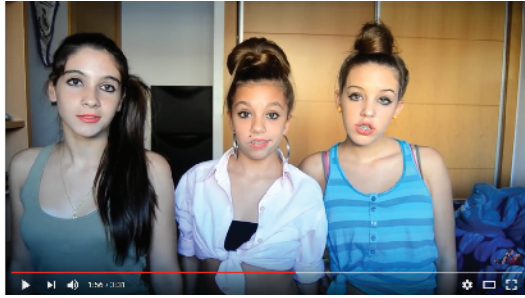
The lack of sexual narratives can be explained because tutorial videos are based on outward appearance and because they avoid direct enunciation of moral values. Despite this, we can appreciate a common denunciation of hypersexualization in relation to the slut stigma common on social media (Willem et al. forthcoming). Related to that, Armstrong et al. pointed out that women's participation in slut shaming 'is about drawing class-based moral boundaries that simultaneously organize sexual behaviour and gender presentation [...]'. High-status women employ slut discourse to assert class advantage, defining their styles of femininity and approaches to sexuality as classy rather than trashy' (2014: 101). This way of sanctioning gender performance acceptably, rather than the private sexual life of other women, is a disciplinary social method as long as the social differences are read as sexual differences (Ortner 2006: 34). As we can see in 'How to be a choni', 'women use slut discourse to support status distinctions that are, in this case, linked closely to social class' (Armstrong 2014: 104).

Finally, we analyse the signs of cultural competence. In these videos, the most common of the cultural markers that talks about the social ineptitude of the *choni* is the conspicuous and cheap consumer habits related to make-up products. This factor is important because teaching viewers how to consume make-up products is one of the main objectives of beauty tutorials, so using cheap or even free samplers of mascara or lipstick is part of the ironic devices used to subvert this YouTube genre. The condemnation for consuming cheap beauty products is unanimous and unequivocal but is particularly used in the video by Paatristras: 'We need an eyeliner [...] best if it is from the pound shop'¹⁵ [...] and an eye shadow of *Bravo* [famous Spanish teen magazine] of ten centuries ago'. This aspect is also emphasized several times in Sarahhijaputa's video talking about beauty products: 'Now I'm going to put on the mascara, the cheapest I've found' (06:57), 'from the pound shop, from the *Bravo*, *Superpop* [another teen magazine], wherever but the cheapest'¹⁶ (03:40). Actually, Sarahhijaputa constructs all of her *choni* character around the lack of knowledge and understanding of beauty techniques, and she repeats and underscores her ineffectiveness in naming or using the products with affirmations such as 'What's its name? I don't care, it's from the pound shop' (01:37) and 'I'm out of the blue, I'm doing my own fucking thing'¹⁷ (11:32, and also in 03:25 and 06:15).

This lack of consumption competence is also reflected in the wardrobe of the *chonis*, which is full of basic and cheap clothing items as leggings or jackets (Paatristras, 2012: 01:22; Sarahhijaputa, 2014: 09:25), the flashy use of animal print (Paatristras, 2012: 01:17; Sarahhijaputa, 2014: 09:30; Atun Con Pepitas, 2011: 00:56, part I), the overuse of accessories, especially of bags and big hoop earrings (Paatristras, 2012: 01:16; Vallintoners, 2013: 01:40), the ostentatious brands, especially Adidas (Vallintoners, 2013: 01:45; Sarahhijaputa, 2014: 09:35; Lorena Gonzalez, 2016: 00:55), the love for high heels or a particular type of shoes (Victoria and Mustang for Atun Con Pepitas, 2011: 01:54, part I, and wedge heel for Sarahhijaputa, 2011: 09:25) or any item or material that transmits a fake fashion aura, like fake plastic glasses or a fake 'I Love NYC' T-Shirt in Atun Con Pepitas. This artificiality is complemented by the habit of painting fake facial piercings with the help of eyeliner, as we can find in videos by Sarahhijaputa (12:35), Atun Con Pepitas (00:30, part III), Lorena Gonzalez (00:41), Vallintoners (01:06) and Paatristras (01:09). We can read these inauthentic fashion marks in relation to the cultural concept of natural beauty as a bourgeois ideal of attractiveness, which for Skeggs (2005: 100) is related to the occultation of beauty labour. Talking about excessively styled hair, something also present in these videos, Skeggs explains that 'the binary between nature/artifice is mapped through hidden/apparent labour, read on the body through appearance'. The obviously produced look of the *choni* takes part in this natural/artificial dialectic, making apparent the relationship of the working-class women with beauty labour and its fabricated character that can be easily replicated or mimicked on YouTube.

Finally, we conclude our analysis of the videos talking briefly about broader cultural markers such as the grammar, syntax, semantics, idioms and pronunciation used in the construction of the *choni*, which generally refer to poorly educated women in their exclusion of letters ('comío' for 'comido'), their mispronunciation of beauty products ('airliner' for 'eyeliner') and their informal writing. Atun Con Pepitas commits part of her analysis of *chonis'* manners to the kind of writing used in social media statuses, particularly those posted on Tuenti and their unjustified iteration of vowels, but this analysis is beyond

15. The pound shops or discount variety stores in Spain are racialized as 'Chinese shops' (01:01)
16. 'ahora me voy a poner la máscara, la más barata que he encontrado' / 'de los chinos, de la Bravo, del Superpop o de lo que sea, de lo más barato'.
17. '¿Cómo se llama? Qué más da, me lo compré en los chinos' / 'que no me entero que yo lo hago a mi puto mundo'.



Figures 2 and 3: Vallintoners (2013), 'Aprende a ser la choni perfecta', Youtube.

the goals of this article. Curiously enough, according to these videos the only cultural competence allowable for the *chonis* is their mastery and control of self-representation in social media, and particularly on their Tuenti profile; however, this capacity is dismissed again as an opportunity for self-sexualization, as they strike a pose and make duck face.

CONCLUSIONS

Our analysis of YouTube videos related to the construction of the *choni* has led us to conclude that, similar to the formulation of the English *chav*, in the Spanish recession the othering of lower social classes is built around a chain of signs of symbolic domination. These signs are at the same time a recrudescence and a displacement of the traditional discourses around social class, in a 'euphemistic transference' of music, clothing, gendered bodies and especially cheap and conspicuous consumption, and are based in the classic Bourdieuan definition that tastes 'function as markers of "class"' (Bourdieu 1986a: 2). For Bourdieu, taste

functions as a sort of social orientation, a 'sense of one's place', guiding the occupants of a given place in social space towards the social positions adjusted to their properties, and towards the practices or goods which befit the occupants of that position.

(1986a: 466)

This construction of social class as a lifestyle or as fashion highlights how the neo-liberal discourses of the privatization of social class differences and the personal responsibility of poverty, disguised as 'choice incompetence', have succeeded in a country facing a dramatic economic crisis.

These videos are also an important cultural indicator of the beliefs of the middle classes in Spain and their fear of being confused with the lower classes, displayed in the way they create a recognizable stereotype, the *choni*. Skeggs, citing Homi Bhabba, explains how 'the real problem of differentiation in the contemporary is not distance but proximity. The problem is of perceived similitude by those who feel to close' (2005: 96). During the economic crisis in Spain, where over three million people have been expelled from the middle classes (Estefanía 2016; Gómez 2016; Tairi 2016), this sensation of closeness is overwhelming and the visual and rhetoric devices used in these videos serve not only to impose fixity on the *chonis* but to exercise by the vloggers the required self-reflexivity to succeed in a neo-liberal system.

In addition to this, we can consider these videos as tools for social 'othering'. As Schwalbe et al. (2000: 422) suggest, othering is a process of creating and reproducing inequality where a dominant group redefines an inferior group. Among the forms that othering can take, one that is particularly relevant to the discourses about the *choni* is the 'defensive othering' as 'identity work done by those seeking membership in a dominant group'. This adaptive reaction of accepting the legitimacy of the social stigma of your own group but distancing oneself from it, of othering your own people (young women in this case) is part of a larger social differentiation process between the so-called middle classes and the underclasses, and is particularly relevant in the Spanish society after the economic crisis.

This article has highlighted the way this self-reflexivity is trained in a platform such as YouTube, where the notion of authenticity is blurred and where the entrepreneurial dogma is present. These findings have confirmed the idea of the 'spreadability' of the ideas (Burgess and Green 2009) used by the vloggers, social class being one of the most powerful. We have proven how the banal, personal and informal characteristics of the videos can create a feeling of affinity, which can also be considered as a social class affinity. This mood is reinforced by the class-comedy on display in the videos that helps to create a bond and, as Taylor notes, is constitutive of social class.

The self-reflexivity shown in these videos is, as we have described, especially fruitful in beauty tutorials where the pedagogical and performative aspects of the teaching processes allow different degrees of self-construction or self-branding. The process of identity construction through YouTube is built on media materials and is crossed by social and economic positions; the *choni*, lacking of flexibility, informal knowledge or even access to the technology, is the fixed and pathologized Other that can be imitated. The vlogger has the capacity to enter and exit from this character, and in this process they can prove their consumer skills and make evident the disciplinary elements related to beauty techniques (hair, make-up, body language). In this social class surveillance and beauty discipline regime, as in Victorian conduct manuals, the representation of normative bodies, clothes and attitudes is reinforced.

Finally, the evidence from this study suggests that the figure of the *choni* as created by these vloggers is a racialized one, with clear connections with the Romani community and young Latinas. In this process of racialization and ethnization, the *choni* appears in relation to dirt and sexuality, showing a peripheral whiteness of appearance that seems more authentic and enjoyable in the game of self-construction and self-differentiation on YouTube. The character of the *choni* is also hyper-sexualized in her excess of bodily materiality and her use of wardrobe. Hypersexualization is also linked to the 'slut shaming' process by which class differentiations are reinforced. Furthermore, showing her association with the *chavette*, the *choni* is a culturally incompetent character in her cheap habits of consumption, in her fabricated looks that display the labour implicit in feminine beauty and in her lack of proper cultural markings.

Taken together, these findings suggest a renovation of the unexpired Spanish's class differentiation mechanisms towards a new visual and gender regimen, which puts again at the heart of the public debate the figure of the young underclass woman who concentrates all the social anxieties of a country living one of the deepest economic and social crisis of its history.

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Are victims to blame? Youth, gender and moral discourse on online risk

ABSTRACT

This article takes a discourse analysis frame to understand how young people's norms and moral evaluations of their practices on digital media are culturally negotiated between their own and their peers' experiences, parental concerns, awareness programmes and media representations. It draws on focus groups and interviews with 171 participants aged 13–16 from nine European countries, analysing how young people position themselves towards online experiences, particularly bullying, sexual communication and contact. While teenagers can sympathize with victims of bullying, especially if they perceive them as vulnerable, they can blame older teenagers, girls or parents for initiating or being co-responsible for risks young victims are involved in. They are judged as in failing, when they choose to not comply with self-protection and self-vigilance (Giddens 1991, Dobson and Ringrose 2015, Gill and Scharf 2011), which can be detected in young people's moral discourses as a successful way of being and behaving online.

KEYWORDS

discourse
online risk
digital media
cross-cultural
young people
responsibility

ARE VICTIMS TO BLAME? YOUTH, GENDER AND MORAL DISCOURSE ON ONLINE RISK

Research on children and young people's use of online media indicates that only a small percentage of children encounter online risks directly (Livingstone

et al. 2011; Mascheroni and Ólafsson 2014). In an age of technological abundance, with the increasing penetration of digital and mobile media across different parts of the world, there is a need to look at the moral aspects of the interaction that takes place on and around digital media, to understand how technical possibilities are refrained by moral stances, and how these are culturally formed.

Morality in relation to children and media has been discussed mostly in terms of the evaluations of media use, regarding the reasonable, right, or unacceptable use of the media (Hagen 2000; Bengtsson 2011) and its impact for interpersonal and power relationships (Hagen and Jorge 2015). However, attention to the moral negotiation of behaviour through the media, and particularly digital media, is less common (Mostmans et al. 2014). Particularly, the use of social media by teenagers involves positioning regarding privacy, suggesting 'a highly moralized terrain' (Berriman and Thomson 2014: 583).

On the other hand, the gender dimension of this process has been looked at through a qualitative lens (Light and McGrath 2010; Goodwin et al. 2016), especially in relation to sexual identities entangled in sexting practices (Ringrose et al. 2013) and self-presentation through social media (De Ridder and Van Bauwel 2013). However, other types of risks and opportunities in digital culture, as well as cultural analyses, have been absent. This article investigates how the moral judgements are genderized, drawing on a comparative qualitative study between nine European countries that sought to understand children and young people's perceptions and experiences of problematic situations online (Smahel and Wright 2014). We focus on youth discourses about online risk and their moral negotiations. This article attempts to capture the way they morally evaluate actions online, and investigate the ways in which they express intentions, perceptions and experiences, with particular focus on the implications regarding gender.

RISK PERCEPTION AND MORALITY

Research on children's use of digital media has generally adopted a risks and opportunities framework (Livingstone et al. 2011). Children can take different positions regarding online risks: they may be exposed to inappropriate or unwanted communication (content risks); be involved in risky interactions (contact risks), or actively creating risky content or initiating contact with others (conduct risks) (Hasebrink et al. 2009). While some argue that rather than being new, these are risks which children have always had to face, it is also acknowledged that they have evolved with the digital media (UKCCIS 2012). Through technology, these risks now happen in an environment which is easily accessible, always connected and permanent. Moreover, children's use of the Internet is increasingly becoming mobile and private through the use of devices such as smartphones, and social networking sites (SNS) have pervaded their lives (Mascheroni and Ólafsson 2014, Livingstone et al. 2014).

In 2010, only 12 per cent of European children aged 9–16 who used the Internet and had been exposed to online risk had experienced harm as a consequence (Livingstone et al. 2011); in 2014, 17 per cent reported the same experience (Mascheroni and Ólafsson 2014). However, media coverage of online experiences for children usually portrays an inflated view of their negative experiences, often in relation to exposure to pornography, bullying and stranger danger (Bond 2013). Joffe (2003) postulates that the mass media play

a significant role in simplifying and sensationalizing risks, which explains the moral panics about online risks and also the several efforts to create awareness and educate children and their mentors about them. Although there are cultural variations (Ponte et al. 2009), the way media operate increasingly favours a global coverage of events.

A socio-constructivist framework puts children and young people's online practices into perspective, so the very labels of risk must be traced to wider cultural discourses surrounding and involving children. If media discourses amplify cultural representations of online risks affecting children, these tend to affect children's, peers' and parents' perceptions when they do not have a direct experience of an online risk (Mascheroni et al. 2014). In her ethnographic research throughout the United States, boyd found several young people whose 'fears were rooted not in personal experience but in media coverage magnified by parental concerns' (2014: 102).

The effect of media is, of course, not deterministic. McGovern et al. (2016) described how Australian young people have to reconcile the legal and media discourses of sexting with their own experiences. Individuals tend to use experts' knowledge and media information in 'self-consciously calculative and strategic' ways (Lewis 2006: 468), and local community also plays 'an important role in young people's sensemaking of risk' (Wall and Olofsson 2008: 444).

When young people have had a first-hand experience of a specific risk, this changes their perception and how they behave towards that particular risk (Bond 2013). Actual experiences and the perceptions of risks may differ, even for the children themselves, and sometimes the interpretations of risk are based on an understanding that '[it] emerge[s] between institutions and individuals rather than intrapersonally' (Joffe 2003: 61). In a 2009 study (Atkinson et al. 2009), children aged 14 to 16 perceived that the risks they were most likely to encounter were primarily Internet attacks followed by cyberbullying, threats on SNS and identity fraud, respectively. In 2013–14, the most common risk for European teenagers (11–16) was online communication with strangers (29 per cent) followed by exposure to sexual images and to hate messages (20 per cent each); less common risks were exposure to sexual messages, offline meetings with people they had met online and cyberbullying (Mascheroni and Cuman 2014).

Debates about risk perception thus have a crucial part in understanding which practices children actually perceive as risky. The perception of danger shifts not only according to the object in question (Wildavsky and Dake 1990), but also to individuals and the context of the risk (Lupton and Tulloch 2003; Atkinson et al. 2009). Young people's identity formation, their need to belong and peer pressure, combined with individual differences and their developmental stage (Youn 2005), influence their ability to assess risk, particularly if the benefits they can gain from certain online behaviours are perceived as greater than what it would cost them (Reyna and Farley 2006). Risk evaluation is a process whereby a practice is judged as tolerable or not depending on its potential cost. If the risk is considered intolerable, actions that aim to manage risk ensue, with the aim of transforming the risk into a bearable one (Klinke and Renn 2001).

The formation of perceptions of risk among children also entails what they perceive as right/wrong. Bauwens observes that young people 'explore and construct a morality of their own' (2012: 32), where the values they get from adults (parents, teachers) and the media are negotiated amongst peers. Part of

1. The EU Kids Online network has been funded by the European Commission Safer Internet Programme in three successive phases of work from 2006–14 to enhance knowledge of children's and parents' experiences and practices regarding risky and safer use of the Internet and new online technologies. EU Kids Online III ran from 2011 until 2014, comprising 33 countries. More information and outputs available at <http://eukidsonline.net/>.

this situational and generational morality is established precisely in the online participatory culture where children and young people interact. This poses the challenge that they become part of this online culture while being exposed to alternative norms (Jenkins et al. 2009). However, this has nuances, as 'certain online contexts may engender greater moral sensitivity (...), while others may coincide with greater disinhibition' (Flores and James 2013: 847). Children's peer culture and peer norms, for instance related to online disclosure (James 2009), are also influential in the way they perceive and create a discourse about risks (Smahel and Wright 2014, McGovern et al. 2016).

SNS and self-presentation strategies have been the focus of several researches about young people's practices online (Oosten et al. 2017). As SNS 'are spaces where increasingly normalized hyper-sexualized and pornified discourses and visual imagery circulate rapidly' (Ringrose 2011: 101), teenagers try to obtain 'praise and recognition' while avoiding 'criticism and derision' (Berriman and Thomson 2014: 595). Girls seem to be under particular pressure to attain this balance when posting pictures of themselves online. This is due to the sexual double standards that persist among peers (Mascheroni et al. 2015), especially when 'the sexual intentionality and comments on the pictures are read differently and rewarded for boys, whilst this implication is potentially shameful for girls' (Ringrose and Harvey 2015: 212–13). They have to interpret and manage peer norms that are gendered (Baumgartner et al. 2015).

Agosto and Abbas found that, among their young respondents, 'the feeling of [online] safety was tied to the belief that they were educated users who knew how to protect themselves online' (2015: 11). Discourses on online self-responsibility resonate from wider late-modern neo-liberal subjectivity (Giddens 1991), where individuals are seen as capable of setting themselves free of 'pressures, constraints or influence from outside themselves' (Gill and Scharff 2011: 7). Safety education campaigns have been at the centre of analysis for the reproduction of this subjectivity. Feminist scholars found that legal and pedagogic framings of sexting have drawn the responsibility to lie 'with the body in the image rather than, for instance, the agents of distribution (Hasinoff 2013)' (Ringrose et al. 2013: 307). The old days of 'stranger danger' (Burn and Willett 2005) and restrictive tone have been replaced by 'shame and fear-based sexting education' (Albury et al. 2017: 527; Ringrose and Harvey 2015) which promotes moral connotations for girl sexuality through 'imperatives towards "self-respect", self-value, "facing up to yourself" [...] [and] this encourages victim-blaming' (Dobson and Ringrose 2016: 11). Girls are especially blamed for being caught 'in a morally suspect image' (Ringrose et al. 2013: 316) and made responsible for the surveillance and protection of their sexuality and reputation (Dobson 2017).

RESEARCH CONTEXT AND ANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVE

This article draws on data from a cross-cultural qualitative study under EU Kids Online III,¹ conducted in 2013 (with a pilot in 2012) in nine countries: Belgium, Czech Republic, Greece, Malta, Italy, Portugal, Romania, Spain and United Kingdom (Smahel and Wright 2014; Barbovschi et al. 2013). The study focused on understanding the meaning of online problematic situations for children and young people (9–16), using interviews and focus groups (same-gender and with approximate ages, usually 4–6 participants). Particularly with these age range, focus groups are also considered to

be able to offer richer expressions on attitudes and feelings (Agosto and Abbas 2015) than other methods. A potential problem with these methods of data collection is that participants might want to present themselves to the researchers as what they assume is the best possible way (instead of answering honestly) and, in the case of focus groups, children might also have been swayed to answer what they felt was acceptable to the group (Morgan 1997).

The study was approved by the LSE Research Ethics Committee (project coordinator), and every country's ethics requirements were followed. Participants were recruited through public and private schools, in urban, suburban and rural areas, in a total of 368 respondents, in an overall gender and age balance. Each of the participating countries conducted a minimum of six focus groups and twelve interviews. Focus groups and interviews were transcribed; then a first level of coding consisted of condensed descriptions of the material in English (Rennie et al. 1988). Later, data were coded according to a single coding scheme, and researchers also translated what they considered to be the most relevant parts of each focus group or interview. A second level of coding was conducted by a coordinating group to categorize the scope of risk and opportunities, type of problematic situation, technological platform involved, actors, and any explicit negative or positive feeling mentioned by respondents.

In this article, we focus on how teenage Internet users aged 13–16 position themselves and others in focus groups and interviews regarding risk behaviour, specifically with respect to the way they assign labels and create subject positions with a moral frame: what is right and wrong to do online, who is responsible for the risk and what are the consequences (for whom). This is explored together with gender differences among the participants' discourses. Our sample consists of 171 participants, evenly distributed by gender. There were slightly more 13 and 14-year-olds (54 and 77, respectively) than 15 and 16-year-olds (44, 23); and there were between 14 (United Kingdom) and 28 (Belgium) participants in each country; 119 participated in focus groups and 52 in interviews.

Believing that young people's discourses reflect the moral negotiations they go through (Bauwens 2012, Mostmans et al. 2014, Hagen and Jorge 2015), we adopt the perspective of *positioning*. This investigates how subjects are involved in negotiating power through discourse, based on the way individuals 'are positioned and position themselves in relation to social and moral orders' (Horton 2011: 270). It also involves the way in which 'one speaker can position others by adopting a story line which incorporates a particular interpretation of cultural stereotypes' (Davies and Harré 1990: 50). This theory is also interested in 'the normative frames within which people actually carry on their lives, thinking, feeling, acting, and perceiving – against standards of correctness' (Harré et al. 2009: 9).

Thus, to retrieve data for our analysis, we used Excel to sort out inputs from the first level codes classified as 'risk perceptions' and 'preventive measures', as well as relevant word searches, such as 'guilty', 'guilt', 'blame', 'fault', 'mistake', 'right/wrong', '(ir)responsible/responsibility', 'stupid', 'silly', 'smart/not smart'. We then sought those keywords in all data, and reorganized them into labels around how children attribute or withdraw responsibility to different agents. Our findings show that discourse ranges from sympathizing to blaming the victims as well as from feelings of helplessness to empowerment.

2. From here on, we use 'I' to refer to Interview, and 'FG' to refer to Focus Group.

PERPETRATORS' RESPONSIBILITY

Perpetrators are labelled as 'stupid', 'ridiculous', 'doing wrong' or 'not right', and participants also seem to be hinting at their intention to do harm, sometimes (according to themselves) beyond their understanding. Such mean and offensive behaviour is felt as purposefully intended to manipulate others and do harm. As boyd found, 'what makes an act cruel is not only about the act itself but how it is intended, perceived, and experienced' (2014: 140). Teenagers' discourse shows how they feel that perpetrators lack a basic sense of decency and empathy, because they do not care about others or about the harm they are doing to direct victims, as well as to people who watch it online. They are considered 'bastards' (Boys, 14–16, Italy, FG²) if they target those who are vulnerable, such as very young children, and remain anonymous. From the children's discussions about perpetrators, they only seem to see a slight possibility of excusing their actions if the bullies themselves are vulnerable.

Bullying, ridiculing or offending others online is often considered as cowardly behaviour – 'pure cowardice' (Girl, 16, Portugal, I); 'there are some who do not have enough courage to tell you who they are, so they tell you: I'm from your school, you disgust me [...] things like that' (Girl, 15, Malta, I). An Italian boy, 14, says 'it is so easy' to make fun of peers or insult teachers online when 'one gets a bad mark', but 'it is unfair' because anyone can read it. Several teenagers mention the responsibility to differentiate real life from the online world and how they feel that their peers should not address 'real life' issues online but face-to-face (Girl, 14–16, Italy, I). A Maltese boy, 13, calls those who offend online 'keyboard warriors'.

Teenage girls express how they can be bothered by invasion of privacy, offenses or comments about their sexuality on social media, especially if coming from someone who is close or could be close. A girl from Portugal (16, FG) says she did not like it when she was asked about her virginity through an anonymous SNS, and a Maltese girl was bothered by 'a rumour that I was pregnant' by 'someone from my group' (14–16, FG). This reveals the underlying norm that girls' sexuality should be private (Dobson and Ringrose 2015). An Italian girl (13, I) feels bothered by people who make new friends online and are ready to tell them 'I really love you' soon. The fact that they know the person or that it affects other people they know seems especially disturbing: another Italian girl (11–13, FG) says her ex-boyfriend posted bad comments on photos published on Instagram by her friends where she appeared: 'this really upsets me: comment my pictures if you will, but why comment those of my friends?'. A Belgian girl (15, I) talks of an incident where she was receiving 'rude comments' from a friend. Later she found out that actually it was not her friend who wrote. Instead, someone had created a fake profile of her friend. In the case of sexting, those who ask for photos, often boys, are held responsible and they are in the wrong when they disseminate such material, and a breach of trust is considered as very serious, especially if the perpetrator is a friend. This shows how moral assessments by young people vary according to the relationship they establish with the perpetrators, the way they perceive their power or status and the potential audience of the offense.

SYMPATHIZING WITH VICTIMS

Teasing, ridiculing or making fun of someone on Facebook pages is labelled as bullying especially if the offenses can have a strong emotional impact on the person, *i.e.* based on consequences. A 14-year-old boy from Belgium states that not even an annoying person should be bullied. When teenagers perceive their

peers to have no control of the situation, to be vulnerable or unjustly wronged, and they become victims of bullying or insults, a common reaction is sympathy and sometimes even empathy, where the children place themselves in the victim's shoes. Mostmans et al. defined moral sensitivity as 'the ability to express and show moral consideration in terms of empathy, role-taking and pro-social moral reasoning' (2014: 347). The authors found that Belgian children (9–11) showed a range of empathic behaviours and the ability for perspective taking, but their pro-social moral reasoning was only present in the form of reciprocity.

It is younger participants and girls who show more concern for the suffering and devastation bullied children go through. They relate to stories of other children who were traumatized by experiences of cyberbullying (Girls, 13–14, Czech Republic, FG). Some had to skip town or change school because of such sad and unhappy circumstances. It is also common that they mention suicides or feel that someone was actually killed because of being bullied, in what seems to be often the most extreme cases, sometimes only known through the news media, as other researchers have found (Mascheroni et al. 2014; Boyd 2014). This concern can be interpreted as a performance of femininity, as a counterpart for what Dueñas et al. (2016) found among older participants, that aggressiveness seems to be associated with masculinity.

As for being insulted or ridiculed, a more common experience among participants, they often show an empathic reaction. They feel this is unfair (as the Italian boy quoted above) and senseless and often they cannot fathom the meanness that can exist in certain Facebook pages created purposefully to ridicule. They sympathize with the person who is ridiculed online, who thus has her digital footprint marked by this experience. They understand that, to be in this situation, they might not be savvy enough to think critically about their Internet use, but they don't expect them to become victims if they are clever, as will be presented below.

Similar to Mostmans et al.'s study (2014), teenagers show here a greater empathic capability towards younger children, and express their need to be protected especially from contacts with strangers. Younger ones – 'little brothers and little cousins' (Boys, 13, UK, FG), 'my young cousins' (Girl, 12–13, Spain, FG) – they say, can get easily impressed by sex and violence – 'shocking or nasty things' (Girl, 16, Belgium, I) – and then 'try to re-enact it at school' (Boys, 13–14, Malta, FG). By saying this, they position themselves as older and more mature vis-à-vis younger children – 11-year-olds are 'still too immature' to be on Facebook (Girl, 15, Malta, I). They present themselves as more capable of self-care and effective management of the risks that occur online.

VICTIMS: FROM SYMPATHIZING TO BLAMING

Apart from assigning responsibility to the perpetrator, young people often assign blame to victims, usually when they perceive that peers had some form of control over the situation, thus they could have chosen to do otherwise (Agosto and Abbas 2015). Again, in this case the risk is in the evaluation carried out by peers rather than in actions per se. Revealing too much information, either because they are not savvy enough or they are vain and try to get attention, is understood as 'toying with risk', and therefore victims should not complain about any negative experiences they might encounter, such as if people talk about them, know personal details, receive friend requests from strangers, or their later careers are affected. A Portuguese 16-year-old girl even associates addiction to the Internet to a lack of self-control.

Participants express this in saying that when their peers use certain Internet platforms in order to be liked, they are asking for trouble. Ask.fm is mentioned by teenagers from both genders and in several countries (e.g. Girls, 15, Portugal, FG) as a problematic platform, because the anonymity is convenient for anyone wanting to insult. 'You just shouldn't have an account', a Maltese boy concludes (14–16, FG), so it is seen as a choice one can make.

Sexting incidents are often frowned upon also in girls' discourses, and many blatantly state that girls should not be silly or naive and send their sexy pictures, as Ringrose et al. (2013) also found. It is their own fault if these pictures are shared especially since there has been abundant news and experiences of sexting incidents. This disapproval of nudity and intimacy displaced to the public sphere is evident from the very strong words some children use about their peers who engage in such behaviour (although in such scenarios, they do acknowledge the perpetrator is also at fault, as we mentioned above). A 15-year-old Belgian girl (I) says: 'I don't understand that you can be so stupid to do this [send naked pictures]' and it can't be considered bullying 'because this girl, well [...] she's responsible for it', though the boy should not have shared the pictures.

A group of 13-year-old Spanish girls talk about a worldwide-known video of a girl in Spain who was filmed performing oral sex on a boy in a park, surrounded by six people. This video was brought up by several groups, and they discuss the different levels of responsibility for the exposure: the girl, who is 'a bit silly' for doing it, although willingly, in public rather than intimately; the six by-standers in the park; the person who recorded it; and those who shared it, like themselves, so they ultimately conclude they are 'also to blame'.

The lack of empathy and victim blaming, mainly about sexting (Ringrose et al. 2013), but also relating to contacts with strangers, seems especially punitive for older children and girls. Some boys who say that girls know that when they are exposing themselves through sexy pictures they are inviting strangers, express they want to protect the girls who are close to them.

Some girls take pictures of themselves almost half naked and stuff, and post them on Face[book] [...] I know many girls that really tease boys on Face[book] and that can [...] well, crazy men and what else can try to look for them [...] That's very dangerous.

says a Portuguese boy (15, I). A Maltese 16-year-old expresses concern for his cousin, who is 14 and is 'going through a phase on Facebook', where 'she posts a lot of photos on Facebook, and rather provocative, let's put it this way [...] they are sensual', and he now sees she has 'many older men' as friends whom she doesn't know. 'I feel that in a way it is my duty to tell her something', so apparently he has told her this is not appropriate. Self-presentation and meeting people online are thus presented as following different standards according to gender, as found in other studies in different cultural contexts (Mascheroni et al. 2015; Baumgartner et al. 2015; Ringrose and Harvey 2015).

PARENTS: FROM ASSIGNING RESPONSIBILITY TO GAINING AUTONOMY

Some participants mention the role of parents in preventing risk: a Belgian girl says 'younger children shouldn't be alone on the Internet' (14–15, FG); a Maltese boy thinks there should be 'a parent at home when the child is

younger than 10 years' (13–14, FG); and a 16-year-old girl says 'parents should watch their child; if not children could drop from school, or spend time only in front of the computer' (Romania, I). They particularly associate the need of parental mediation with younger users, whom they construct as more vulnerable. In their view, it is even acceptable that parents have their children's online passwords (Girl, 16, Belgium, I).

Some, both boys and girls, assign direct responsibility to parents when risks take place, in what are often classed judgements. A teenage boy from the UK points to the irony in the use of smartphones: 'parents wonder why everyone's getting so fat' (13–14, FG), implying parents should prevent it. In the case of videos of fights, a 14-year-old girl from the same country (I) says 'parents probably, like, sort of, halfway to blame about how, like, what's happening, you've got not enough control about your son or daughter'. Other participants echo the same attitude:

There are several news on Facebook [...] saying this girl was I don't know what and ended up raped and shit. But some parents are *stupid*: they see children talking to strangers and let them keep doing it.

(Boy, 14, Portugal, FG)

A – Now children who usually see [bullying] and suffer don't have the right support from their parents, who are missing many hours from home [...]

I – Parents, you mean?

[...] A – Not only the parents, that you learn not only from their parents, that might be interested in you, to see who you are, how you use the Internet while you can say that I go to my friend's house and over there the parent doesn't know what you will do.

(Girls, 15, Greece, FG)

While teenagers say that parents have the responsibility to support and accompany their children's Internet use, especially when younger, they also express the fear of being judged by their parents, and sometimes, this is a reason to hide some activities from them. Some boys are fearful that their parents will *catch* them doing something online that they don't think is right in the adult's eyes, but which are either part of teen cultures or that the teenager didn't have control over.

Well, you could have, say you accidentally you went on to inappropriate site and then your parents suddenly start questioning you about this because maybe they saw you and straight away they're going to be, like, they're going to judge you because even if you say by accident they're probably not even going to believe you.

(Boy, 13–14, UK, FG)

Among girls, the fear for judgement from parents on their social media behaviour was evident particularly in Southern European countries, which may indicate a stronger morality especially related with girls' sexuality. A girl from Portugal (15, FG) tells how a year earlier, her mother made her close her hi5 account after she found out that a boy she met through that SNS was sending her 'pictures of him naked' and 'doing strange things'. A 14-year-old Spanish girl says she would not tell her parents about any problems she might have with using the webcam and exposing, because 'the first thing they would say

to me would be “why do you use the webcam?”, or that “you’re the fool”, or “who told you to do that?”.

When managing safety and autonomy, teenage girls seem more accepting of parents monitoring their social media and Internet use. However, the quote below from a boy also shows the self-monitoring that is associated with this acceptance of parents’ control. This allows boys and girls to position themselves as responsible, careful and cooperative.

Yeah, parents should check on their children or so. My mum often watches over my shoulder when I’m on Facebook or so. I don’t mind that, but not all the people do this, so [...]

(Girl, 14, Belgium, I)

If my mother wants to see my mobile, I give it for her to see, *I got nothing to hide*. [...] I offer it to her and from that alone she knows there’s nothing wrong in it.

(Boy, 14, Spain, I)

SELF-RESPONSIBILITY: FROM HELPLESSNESS TO EMPOWERMENT

Some participants talk about the online space as being one of impunity, where people can get away with things. ‘There’s not much that can be done’ if there is cyberbullying, says a Portuguese boy, 13, who found himself ‘without knowing what to do’ when some schoolmates created a Facebook group to tease a teacher and added him. A Portuguese 16-year-old girl expresses twice during the focus group her feeling of helplessness in face of a ‘video of a mother beating up a baby’ she watched with her mother; and of a sexual solicitation to a 11-year-old girl on Ask.fm. She describes how on both occasions she showed what she saw online to her mother, how they were bothered but at the same time curious, and how ‘we watch it and just feel powerless’ and ‘because it’s online, no one can do anything’.

In contrast to the participants who see social media as a sphere of impunity where they don’t know how to deal with offense and harm to them or others, or to the ones that challenge rules (a teenage boy from Portugal and one in the United Kingdom presented themselves as hackers), some teenagers position themselves as cautious and responsible for their online behaviour:

I don’t think I have [experienced anything unpleasant online], because I’m always very calm. And also when I play and stuff, it’s with my group of friends and never [...] I never suffered bullying or anything like that. Maybe I was lucky, or with the kind of friendships that I had, or because I am someone who likes to be well with everyone, I like to have fun but I can also be respectful – and I like to respect the other person. It could be that.

(Boy, 16, Portugal, I)

I don’t know if [take a naked photo of myself and keep it on my mobile] it’s right or wrong, I wouldn’t do it.

(Boy, 15–16, Greece, FG)

Children speak of self-responsibility and self-management of online experiences for them and their peers together with being liable for decisions taken about what is good or bad and facing the resulting consequences. Avoiding risks is also mentioned as an option especially when someone is easily

impressed or not mature enough, *e.g.* to play particular games. These preventive measures seem to position themselves as successful users. Mottos from Safer Internet campaigns are literally reproduced by Portuguese 15-year-old girls, when talking about an incident of revenge porn:

C – I saw a story about a boy [...]

S – That published pictures of his ex-girlfriend, they broke up, he had pictures that were meant only for him and he decided to upload them for everyone! [...] She will never be able to delete them.

C – Yes. As they say: *once online, forever online*.

I – So what do you do with that rule?

A – There are things we shouldn't publish, we have to think beforehand. Some things, we have to think, to ponder if we should or should not [...]

C – I don't think it's just 'some things', it's pretty much anything! (FG)

In terms of contact with others, and especially on social media, the user should be respectful, know how to interact with friends, and should carry out background research before adding someone they do not know. Teenagers criticize peers who are obsessed with having an extensive number of friends on SNS in order to maximize the number of likes they obtain and for this reason often add people whom they do not know. As a way to avoid risk, children advocate for common sense when revealing information and sharing photos online. They argue that caution is also to be exercised when posting, sharing and liking. Refraining from adding people was another such choice: a 15-year-old girl says she 'avoids adding friends of [...] people who write things I don't agree with, vulgar' (Italy, I).

Another aspect of this self-responsibility is to not indulge in watching inappropriate content when it is encountered accidentally, or to be smarter than pop-ups which are meant to tempt the user to click on them. 'Sticking to values' is another important factor in children's discourse about user responsibility: a Maltese boy speaks of pornographic pop-up as 'temptation' (13–14, FG). Being truthful when presenting oneself online was another value mentioned by the children. This includes not manipulating photos or lying about relationships. Morality is thus directly linked to self-responsibility.

Users should also be able to understand the intentions of others' online behaviour, including knowing how to recognize a fake profile and to be aware of the implications of not recognizing them (Boys, 14–16, Malta, FG). Children also see their peers as responsible for understanding the intention of particular behaviours (such as jokes) online and not take them personally.

Coupled with the responsibility the Internet user has, teenagers often speak of how online behaviour involves one to actively choose to behave in a particular way. Some mention choosing not to create accounts with specific platforms or not to like particular pages. Not reacting impulsively, ignoring comments or not attributing them importance seems vital:

See here, you learn to live and let live or you learn to build your character because of these things – it's like after – if for example they offend

you and you answer back, then at the end you mature, you realize – I shouldn't have done that and it's like a positive aspect then as you learn not to do it again, not to stoop to their level.

(Girl, 15, Malta, I)

Users, teenagers say, are responsible for using reliable sources of information online and for keeping up to date with information about safety. Through their discourse, participants seem to be implying that media literacy can help them be careful and cautious. This media literacy is acquired not only through experience, showing personal resilience, but also through parental mediation, guidance and companionship, and through digital safety initiatives. Girls, in particular, echo a discourse on combining of self-care and relying on parents' advice or their support:

These are my main concerns: keep my parents attentive to everything and try to be responsible for myself.

(Girl, 16, Portugal, I)

It was my family more than anything. I did not know how to behave and they supported me. They helped me, suggesting how to behave, and on my part I was clever enough to listen to them, because there are people who don't.

(Girls, 14–16, Italy, FG)

CONCLUSIONS

This article took a discourse analysis framework that allowed us to understand young people's norms and moral evaluations of their practices on digital media. These moral standards result of the negotiation between their own or their peers' experiences, parental concerns, awareness programmes and media representations (Smahel and Wright 2014; Mascheroni et al. 2014; Agosto and Abbas 2015; Dobson and Ringrose 2016; Albury et al. 2017). By taking a focus beyond (gender and sexual) self-presentation practices online, specifically sexting, we were able to detect that the victim-blaming process occurs for other types of online practices, such as contacts with strangers or Internet addiction. While teenagers can sympathize with victims of bullying, especially if they perceive them as vulnerable, by defining victims as initiators and co-responsible for risks they are involved in – especially in the case of sexting – young people create a double punishment for those who are affected by negative experiences online. As found before, girls are especially affected by this process (Ringrose et al. 2013; Dobson 2017). This is evident in girls' and boys' discourses and especially in older participants' voices, some of whom echo the discourses spread by digital safety campaigns and news stories (Mascheroni et al. 2014; boyd 2014; Dobson and Ringrose 2015).

Victim blaming also occurs to children whose parents are perceived as not supporting them in their Internet use or, in their own words, as not restricting it enough. This then is also a classed judgement, that ignores the constraints for different kinds of families and children in their Internet experience. While younger users exposed to risks are excused for the lack of parental support, teenagers are expected to know how to behave online. In fact, young people's moral discourses seem to promote a self-responsibility that is positioned as a successful and ethical way of being and behaving online, of navigating

successfully the online world. Those who don't succeed in following those principles may be recriminated – and since girls are portrayed as more exposed to harm, their understanding of privacy seemed to be more restrictive. Associating this self-responsibility with parental mediation, girls seem to be under particular pressure to negotiate support from family, advice on safety, and monitoring of their online behaviour.

The self-responsibility discourse that lies at the basis of the blaming of victims is also a sign of the individualization of the digital culture (Giddens 1991), where 'the autonomous, calculating, self-regulating subject of neo-liberalism bears a strong resemblance to the active, freely choosing, self-reinventing subject of postfeminism' (Gill and Scharff 2011: 7). Young people and specially girls are invited to reproduce a kind of subjectivity where the young user should work for his or her self-protection and will be scrutinized by others. As denounced by Dobson and Ringrose (2015), this discourse on self-protection can be traced to safety campaigns which have promoted a judgement environment instead of one of solidarity and support for victims. Implications for safety campaigns are thus to promote greater empathy for young people affected by negative experiences and to question moral behaviours that accentuate exclusion, rather than question the causes of inequality.

As limitations of this study, we should point those related with nuances in respondents' discourses related to the non-native languages that might have been lost. Although the two authors could read the original transcripts in five languages, for the other four we had to rely on the coding and translations to analyse the discourse. Furthermore, this research was carried out in 2013, although we consider that understanding moral discourse about victims in the online context remains applicable, particularly because the understanding of morals and victim-blaming in online contexts and on SNS has not been addressed very often, especially in a qualitative and comparative way, and because moral discourses don't change as fast as practices.

Interesting continuations to this research would be a cross-cultural comparison of parents and school agents' accounts by qualitative methods, so as to confront the reflections of young people on media, legal and pedagogic contours of these moral norms (McGovern et al. 2016), as well as interviews with those responsible for regional (i.e. European-scale) and national online safety promotion.

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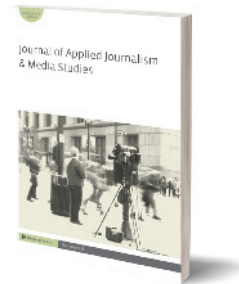
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‘Fight like a girl’: Virtual bedroom culture in public school occupations in Brazil

ABSTRACT

The aim of this work is to analyse a possible association of feminist engagement, young women and media activism through observing the public school occupations (PSO) in the state of São Paulo, Brazil, in 2015. This issue has implications for education, gender and media policies, and citizenship. Cultural Studies was the main theory approach used, especially the concept of bedroom culture. The research design of this study was qualitative and exploratory with focus group data analysis. In the results we observe that gender had a specific relationship with the PSO due to the central role of females in the movement, which was highlighted by the six girls who participated in the focus group. The online and offline involvement with this movement helped increase gender awareness among the youth, enabling the development of a political posture for the confrontation of the oppression and domination of women, especially for girls who had never had contact with feminism out of their bedrooms.

KEYWORDS

feminism
gender
youth
media activism
public school
occupations (PSO)
bedroom culture
Brazil

INTRODUCTION

The first women's bathroom in the Plenary of the Brazilian Federal Senate was only built in 2016 55 years after the inauguration of this space that only had a male bathroom. This fact, perceived as a progress for women senators

1. The central focus of the documentary *Fight Like a Girl* was interviews with girls who participated in public school occupations. This film inspired us, including the title of this article. 'Fight like a girl' is an expression used by the feminist movement to designate the importance of gender equality. The film is available on YouTube with English subtitles (<https://goo.gl/N19q55>) since November 2016 and has already received almost 60,000 views.

who made the claim, was significant for the movement towards equality between genders in Brazil, but also resulted in a slowness in this process. Has social media's move towards speediness given new directions and provided ways to request more rights for women in the country? In this article we focus on this question from the point of view of the feminist engagement of youth, especially observing the *public school occupations* (PSO) in the state of São Paulo, Brazil, in 2015. In this case teenage students, particularly between the ages of 14 and 18 years, mobilized themselves in a movement to occupy schools, taking over the sites and remaining there for an indefinite period, that is, until their demands were met. The main inspiration came from an analogous movement of Chilean students (the Penguin Revolution) that took place in 2006, especially with respect to mobilization strategies (Romancini and Castilho 2017).

In terms of analysis, this movement has an interesting feature: the girls' central role in this event, as noted by the press (e.g. Amendola 2015), in analyses of the case (Campos et al. 2016), in the discourses of young activists and finally in a documentary about the PSO (Colombini and Alonso 2016).¹

This seems to be a new milestone in the women's struggle in Brazilian society. The feminist movements in Brazil and America Latina had their early roots in the nineteenth century and have played an important role in pressuring for women's rights and social justice (Costa 2005; Matos 2017). These movements have also taken place in international networks, with feminists from the north, since the 1970s. Many improvements in social conditions of women in Brazil were reached thanks to claims of feminists (e.g. vote, divorce, protective labour or anti-femicide laws). Currently the main demands of Brazilian women are linked to concerns of third-wave feminism, such as abortion rights and larger participation in politics. In some contexts, the young girls appear in this landscape with new digital tools, participating in the cyber-feminism movement (Gajjala and Oh 2012).

All those issues are important for this research and we are particularly interested in two dimensions: 1) social media as a component of feminist social activism and 2) the association between the process of feminist identity construction and media covering the PSO. In summary, this event was a mobilized protest organized by young students between the ages of 14 and 18 years against the so-called 'school reorganization' proposed by the São Paulo state government, which would lead to the closure of some schools. In November 2015, after a series of street protests failing to open a dialogue with the government, the students decided to 'occupy' their schools, staying inside for an indefinite period of time (i.e. until their demands were heard). The PSO fits into a set of contemporary Brazilian social movements that somehow involve youth and digital media technologies.

Youth and the population in general have held several demonstrations in recent years in order to express their displeasure and request improvements in living conditions. The best-known example was the *June days* or *Brazilian Spring* of 2013. The Internet, especially social network sites, was an important form of support for the movement, allowing alternative press coverage of the protests.

This also occurred in the case of the PSO, however, apparently more structural in the student movement as it depended on the participation of parents, teachers, the neighbourhood school and the broader society, in a context in which – particularly at the beginning – the mainstream media ignored the PSO or framed it negatively.

Students and those who supported the movement used the Internet and different technology tools, such as digital survey forms, WhatsApp messaging application, Twitter, Instagram and, mainly, the social network, Facebook, for the creation of pages in support of the movement and Internet pages dedicated to the occupation of certain schools. In the 219 occupied schools, 50 (23 per cent) had a Facebook page that helped to spread the PSO.²

Occupations were successful in producing alternative media made by students themselves and other friendly individuals/groups. In general, the concept of 'transmedia organizing' by Costanza-Chock (2014) is also appropriate for Brazilian student activists. Like the 2006 student walkouts in Los Angeles, young Brazilians 'produced a generative moment, as young people appropriated social media tools to circulate information about the struggle in (nearly) real time' (Costanza-Chock 2014: 55). Among the similarities of the two events are the horizontal structure and tactical innovations. However, the Brazilian PSO was helped by a larger access to the communications devices in the context of 2016.

In the current panorama, in societies with a certain level of adoption of digital technologies, it is not surprising that, as noted by analysts of contemporary forms of social mobilization, the online and offline worlds are deeply intertwined and cannot be separated in today's social movements (Castells 2015; Sorj 2016). What is unique about the PSO movement of São Paulo students, however, is the role of teenage girls.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

A general objective of this work is to understand the role of young women in the PSO, particularly analysing the movement's relations through the formation of gender consciousness, political activism and engagement with the media. This objective is highly important in terms of understanding this current phenomenon, with implications for education, gender and communication policies, and citizenship.

This work adopts a qualitative and exploratory perspective in the phenomenon analysis. The study's main issues can be summarized in the following research questions:

- Is it possible to establish relationships between the emergence of gender identity/youth, feminism and political activism in the PSO? If yes, what are they?
- What is the role of social media in this process?

The main methodology³ was the focus group with six young students who participated in the PSO, utilizing exploration qualitative data on the participation of students in occupied schools. We chose one author (female) to conduct the focus group because the presence of the other author (male) could have influenced the results, given that the girls could have felt uncomfortable talking in his presence. This focus group was held on 30 November 2016 in São Paulo. The audio was recorded and then transcribed for analysis, and the dynamics of the discussion followed a script with the main issues of interest: motivations and activities of occupying, youth feminism and use of media.

We requested participants to answer a small questionnaire with some data before the focus group. Thus, the adolescents were between 17 and 18 years old (therefore, 16 and 17 at the time of the PSO), self-identified as socio-economic levels C (monthly household income between €540 and €1.310) and D/E

2. This information is a result of counting the data from the occupied schools, provided by the Independent Media Center of São Paulo (2015).
3. Although the research has had a much broader scope of empirical work, this article was mainly based only on a meeting with six young girls using a fundamentally qualitative approach and on the basis of Facebook quantitative data.

| Activist girls | Age | Social class | Ethnicity | Internet main access | Activism family support |
|----------------|-----|--------------|-----------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| A | 17 | C | White | Smartphone | yes |
| C1 | 17 | C | White | Smartphone | no |
| C2 | 18 | C | White | Smartphone | yes |
| G | 18 | D/E | Black | Desktop computer at home | no |
| K | 17 | C | White | Smartphone | yes |
| M | 17 | C | Black | Smartphone | no |

Table 1: Profile of focus group participants.

(monthly household income <€540), of white and black ethnicities. All were studying in public state schools, and four of them were students of the same Technical School (full time) in São Paulo. Neither the schools nor the students are identified, and fictitious names are used. This procedure is justified mainly because some participants of the movement reported retaliation by the school administration after the events. Table 1 summarizes some characteristics of these girls and some qualitative results.

The results of this focus group were analysed in this research, considering the various aspects of these subjects in the process (Connell 2016) that have multiple identities in combination – young, women, students and activists – in line with the earlier research questions. In a complementary approach, some media productions of the students in which gendered content appears are also analysed. The selection of these data was made after scraping Facebook posts created by students in 42 occupied schools. These pages were active in December 2016 (other Facebook pages of occupied schools like those were unavailable). Posts scraped were from 1 November 2015 until 31 January 2016, shortly before the beginning of the occupations and sometime later. It has been noticed that most of the pages had been created in the context of the PSO (with names such as ‘School of struggle – School Name’).

As dimensions related to gender are important and offer a contextualization in the situation of this topic in contemporary Brazil, a brief presentation on the relationship of the theme with the media activism follows.

WOMEN IN BRAZIL AND THEIR FORMS OF DIGITAL ACTIVISM

The change in women’s social position – women who began to occupy positions in the public space – reached a status similar to those of men, which was, according to Hobsbawm (1995), the most relevant social transformation that has occurred in the second half of the twentieth century. This trend that took place almost all over the world also happened in Brazil, a country marked by a late economic development and profound social inequalities. In any case, there were advances in female conditions mainly in modern urban centres. Some improvements in Brazilian women’s social indicators indicate that the first decade of the twenty-first century was called ‘Women’s decade’ (Costa 2013: 38).

However, the paths to these changes also have weaknesses and setbacks. Thus, in 2010 the election of a woman (Dilma Rousseff) for the presidency was significant (re-elected four years later). After this, in 2016, in a troubled

process, she was dismissed by the Congress, in what was seen as a '*coup d'état*' by broad sectors of society. This '*coup*' had sexist components, according to some analyses (Tiburi 2016), and was also apparent from Rousseff's first speech after she was removed (Rousseff 2016). The fact that the political group that took power after Rousseff's impeachment assembled a government without any women in ministerial positions strengthened the perception of the sexist position. In addition the mainstream press (which supported movements against Rousseff) focused their attention on a young and new first lady defined positively in a story as 'beauty, maiden-like and housewife' (Linhares 2016). Such news spread quickly on social networks, generating a movement with the hashtag #belarecatadaedobar⁴ (#beautymaidenlikeandpubgirl), in which women published pictures of themselves in flippant situations as a form of protest against the ideal female portrait generated by the first lady. Girls of an occupied school published a post with an ironic junction of text and an image (Figure 1).

4. See also <https://goo.gl/T6MqAN> and <https://goo.gl/QcKL2D>. Part of the purpose, ironic due to the resemblance in Portuguese between the words 'home' (lar) and 'pub' (bar).

More generally, it should be noted that the issue of women in Brazil involves a variety of orders of gender in a specifically situated Latin American country whose struggles are associated with the legacies of a slave and colonial society and by patriarchal governance. Therefore, the reflections of Connell (2016), directed towards the analysis of the *subject of feminism* from the southern perspective, advocate the need for a reformulation of ways of thinking about forms of gender analysis considering that Brazilian society is postcolonial.

According to Connell, since this subject is established by feminist theory, to derive the political meanings of gender analysis, it is important to recognize the diversity of voices and experiences surrounding the presence of women in politics (2016: 30). In this sense, the relationship between political engagement and women in Latin America is linked to a postcolonial culture, and articulated with the political and economic order as in other southern contexts.



Figure 1: Posting of an Occupied school with women presenting themselves according to the 'beauty, maiden-like and lady home' (Ocupação E.E. Castro Alves) (2015), 'Belas, recatadas e do lar', Facebook, 14 December, <https://goo.gl/Rm8vnK>. Accessed 4 December 2016.

5. This term refers to a set of practices of violence against women, including the ways in which the victims of sexual harassment are blamed for this, normalizing the sexual behaviour of violent men.

The postcolonial and intersectional perspective (Spivak 1988; Griffin and Chávez 2012) is fundamental to understanding 'southern' feminism because obviously the end of colonization does not resolve the gender issue. This is important, especially in contexts of social inequality, where poor and black women suffer more discrimination.

We now see intersectional frameworks in a wide range of theoretical traditions and fields, including queer theory, third wave feminism, and cultural studies. Crenshaw's (1986) coining of the term *intersectionality* offered a single word to describe a long and complex discussion about Black women's multiple forms of simultaneous oppression.

(Noble and Tynes 2016: 2)

Poverty is one of the 'natural' factors to developing a posture against social, family and economic oppression; as Kearney said, 'Poor women need few inducements like "liberation" to seek jobs outside the domestic sphere given the harsh economic realities of their lives' (2006: 310). Therefore, as Ahmed argues '[i]n making feminism a life question, we will be judged as judgmental. [...] To live a feminist life is to make everything into something that is questionable. The question of how to live a feminist life is alive as a question as well as being a life question' (2017: 15). In Brazil's case, the poor and black women naturally live a double or triple life question.

An example of such complexity is the extensive discussion that occurred in recent years in Brazil on the so-called *rape culture*.⁵ The roots of this rape culture are in the historic basis of deeply divided societies shaped by colonialism because gendered violence had great importance in these contexts – the rape of women during colonization was considered normal (Connell 2016: 31).

Although this history of gender inequality is still a reality in Brazil, the social media has played a fundamental role in confronting these issues. As Castells points out, women were at the forefront of most of the recent social movements (e.g. 15M, *Indignadas*) that used the Internet as a medium to mobilize, particularly stressing the important role of the mobilizing videos created by the Egyptian authorities: 'Women played a major role in the Egyptian revolution' (2015: 71).

In the case of Brazil, the digital media represents an instrument for women's struggles and we can point to examples of media activism related to the previous discussion. Thus, in 2014, the global movement #ElesPorElas (#HeForShe) was embraced locally by the solidarity campaign of UN Women Brazil – an agency of the United Nations for gender equality and the empowerment of women – having some impact and inspiring several street mobilizations since 2015. Social media has been a space in which many other groups and movements have developed, including a series of emerging feminist collectives and campaigns related to feminist causes in the Brazilian context. As Noble and Tynes noted, black feminist technology could '[...] articulate concerns about how Black women and girls are racially engaged through algorithmic imperatives that foreground profits over problematic narratives' (2016: 4).

Recent studies, such as the Facebook pages of the *Marcha das Vadias* (Slut Walk) (Name and Zanetti 2013; Silva and Colussi 2016), and the website called 'Girl, you're sexist' (Rocha and Tranquilin 2016), have analysed aspects of these mobilizations, sometimes highlighting the articulation between online and offline areas.

In summary, the global tendency of many women to find a voice on the Internet that is at the same time a discussion forum and a platform for feminist activism is occurring in Brazil. It is controversial how the use of the Internet by itself constitutes the emergence of a 'Fourth-Wave' feminism. However, it is 'increasingly clear that the Internet has facilitated the creation of a global community of feminists [...]. The Internet has created a culture in which sexism or misogyny can be "called out" and challenged' (Munro 2013: 23).

There are those who argue that we are living in a new feminism in Brazil, precisely because of the growth of young feminist movement:

The issues related to the youth condition acquired greater relevance only in the last ten years, which contributed to the discussions on youth to gain visibility involving various actors and public arenas and reverting public policies geared specifically for this segment.

(Zanetti 2011: 50)

A qualitative study that conducted interviews of young feminists in Rio de Janeiro has identified that the activist trajectory and 'join the movement' mentality have a strong connection with educational spaces (Zanetti 2011). Some interviewees said that the involvement with student movements, workshops held in their universities or training, helped to strengthen this awareness. In the specific case of teenagers who participated in PSO, activism also occurred in the school space, although gender discussions are not traditionally carried out in the school space in Brazil.

The investigation conducted by McRobbie and Garber (2006, first published in 1975) involved observing the female subcultures of youth in the United Kingdom and questioned whether the girls did not participate in the movements or were made invisible by the studies. Just like these authors, we intend to investigate the relationship between girls and subcultures, specifically analysing the centrality of spheres, such as the school, family and media. In this sense, it is believed that these three institutions mainly impacted on the development of feminist consciousness: the school, because, as we saw, the teenagers know the condition mainly through the education system and its powers of coercion are reflected when there is open conflict with the school (Connell 2009); the family, as we noticed in the testimonies of the girls, strongly influences the process of developing an activist posture; and the media, because, in the wider context of this research, the analysis of the occupy pages on social networks such as Facebook has made clear the importance of this linkage between activism engagement and social media.

As the school dimension was evidenced throughout this work so far, as an important research component, we will explore the domestic dimension and the media in the following sections.

YOUNG GIRLS AND PSO

A fundamental inspiration for young girls – in addition to the *June days* – came from a similar movement of Chilean students (known as *the rebellion of the penguins*) that occurred in 2006. The Chilean movement provided advocacy strategies and goals that, both in Chile and in Brazil, intertwined educational issues with other demands such as women's rights (in the Chilean case, see Castells 2015: 238).

Like in the documentary movie mentioned, the focus group testimonies revealed that the Brazilians adapted and distributed a guideline from Chilean and Argentinean students with recommendations on 'How to occupy a school'. As one of the younger activists says: 'There are cycles and sequences that will lead to other struggles [...] The Chilean occupation led to the occupations here in São Paulo, we learned with them' (C1).

During the focus group with young girls, the boys' standard and violent position became clear. The boys who did not support the occupations spouted threats of rape as a form of retaliation against the women. According to testimony from one of the participants of the PSO: 'We received a threat of rape of students who were against [the occupation], saying that [they'd] put us in a classroom [...] Went to get everyone and [start a] fire [...] It was horrible'. The idea of a *modernized hegemonic patriarchy* (Connell 2016) was related to the fact that some boys feel comfortable carrying out such threats.

In fact, 'southern' women have several experiences of socialization that culminate in a premature feminist consciousness, all of them related to a class condition, ethnic and racial belonging and sexual orientation (Gonçalves and Pinto 2011: 41). Already from this point of view, de Lauretis argued that the dimensions of the discursive feminism for all women relate to their own stories:

[...] one of the original insights of the women's movement (and one of the terms of the feminist discourse), that the personal is political, that there is a direct relation, however complex it may be, between sociality and subjectivity, between language and consciousness, or between institutions and individuals.

(1986: 5)

In this sense, the process of becoming a feminist for those adolescents consulted is personal, imbricated with the student politics issues, but above all, it is an everyday and personal struggle, as observed in the testimonies:

For me, the feminist movement came first, before the political parties and social movements, because the first thing that affected my life, of course, was sexism. I had an abusive relationship and after that I came out and realized that it actually exists, that guys really are sexist.

(A.)

The feminist struggle is an everyday struggle and we saw this in the occupations, the threats and everything that we suffered through. Our struggle as women had to be there. It was very scary because, as women were the majority and were in the front, everything came as a response.

(K.)

These statements also indicate that these young people are very attentive to the concept of gender as a structure of social relations in which the productive capacities of human bodies are defined by their placement in the arena of reproduction (Connell 2009, 2016). They expressed knowledge on how the order of patriarchal gender domination is based on the construction of privileges of men and the subordination of women. Some of them became aware of this order and began to feel 'erased' when subverting the logic set out for

them, and participating in the spheres that are traditionally dominated by men, such as political parties.

[...] I went to the Socialist Party and began activism at the school. But first I acted at school with three kids who were terrible because they were left wing, but that left-male-chauvinist [*esquerdomacho*] type [...] In other words, they were a more left reformist, but for them 'the left is cool, but only the one who participates in movements that everyone likes'. They were pulling my leg because I was of the PSTU [United Socialist Workers Party] [...]. They did not respect my space to talk, every time I tried to speak; they were shouting, 'Here comes the Zé Maria'.⁶

(A.)

When they started the occupations, the movement leaders decided to make a student government and I went, but it was very sexist and did not give voice to girls.

(M.)

In one way or another, the testimonies show that the consciousness of feminism was acknowledged prior to the involvement within the student movement. However, we realize that the political engagement with the cause allowed new visions for themselves, shaping the process of construction of identity. They realized that they had much more strength if united by a sorority sisterhood. As (A.) said, '[...] with them [members of the occupation] I felt that things were happening, I felt comfortable to speak, take a position'.

The majority of people who occupied the school were girls. There were over twenty broken girls, the people coming in the front saying, 'Let's do it'.

(C1)

Most of the boys were responsible for tasks such as sweeping the courtyard, tidying up the kitchen [...] The girls were more on communication tasks, to seek a lawyer, organize the house, to go into other schools and talk, tasks that involved much more policy and our positioning.

(A.)

We must not forget that we are talking about young people, *subjects in the process* who are active creators of personal dilemmas individually and collectively. The reactions collectively referred to as young subcultures are important clues that '[...] the youth have agency in creating their own lives' (Connell 2016: 151).

DOMESTIC DIMENSION AND MEDIA: BEDROOM CULTURE?

The testimony of the adolescents is, to some extent, consistent with aspects mentioned by McRobbie and Garber (2006) regarding the cultural practices of the English working class of the 1950s. The relationship between the domestic space and the audience was quite different for girls and boys because girls spent most of their time at work and at home and boys spent more time in the streets with friends (McRobbie and Garber 2006). In another context and time, the Brazilian adolescents believe that they are still in a process of subversion of the system of values that glorifies the presence of boys in the streets. They think that

6. José 'Zé' Maria de Almeida is the leader and one of the founders of the United Socialist Workers Party (PSTU).

the involvement with the PSO and feminism has helped to subvert the historic binary construction of public space as masculine and private space as feminine:

All of a sudden, you come out every day [...] And so we will be doing this and it seems that it generates a discomfort in other people. 'She is a girl, so why she is leaving so much? Shouldn't she be at home washing dishes?'.
(M.)

If you have a brother, no one would say it to him!
(G.)

These girls leaving the domestic space represent overcoming of historical barriers, an empowerment that is, for many, driven by the family. Some of them reported, with a tone of pride, the vital role played by the mothers to encourage their participation in street demonstrations and in the occupations of school, enabling them to have the strength to continue in action. This support was available at different levels:

It was my mother who put me into the fight. When I said, 'Mother, I think that we will occupy the School', she was all excited, and said, 'Cool!'.
(K.)

My mother covered up my lies.
(C2)

My family were already landless; they were born in Pernambuco [state of north-east region in Brazil]. The fight is one thing that has been present in my family since early times, so being left wing is like washing dishes for me. [...]. So much so that on the day of the occupation I took a pan from the kitchen and said, 'I'll sleep in school', and my mother replied, '[you should] take other things!'.
(A.)

While some parents are already involved, for others the activism begins within the house, often in the context of household assistance from TV, when the family makes commentaries on the occupation's news – criticizing it –and these girls had to express their thoughts.

The majority of parents have this thing about common sense, if there's anything [on TV] about student gatherings, you hear, 'Everyone there is bum'. I heard these comments from my parents and I began to speak, saying, 'Why do you think this? Do you think that a student has to still accept everything?' It was a family reflection work [...].
(M.)

Thus, activism can start at home and with the aid of television media and the Internet, because, for G., when the demonstrations began, the only information channels on the PSO were the TV and social networks, where she watched with interest and 'supported a lot' the movement. She stressed that in the beginning, she did not know anyone in school who shared her same ideals. In this way, we can notice that sometimes the teenagers find other means to search and discuss their interests. McRobbie and Garber believe that

girls develop alternative strategies to access the sub-cultures and interests, and realize how these girls act together to form new cultures (2006: 186). It is with this sense that the term *bedroom culture* was introduced for the first time into this influential article. After some years, this concept will be used again by Bovill and Livingstone (2001) and Livingstone (2007). In the beginning, the term referred to teenagers who, in their bedrooms, participated in an alternative culture to the experience of the boys in street youth subcultures. The bedroom was a privileged space for girls' cultural activity, reflecting their social position at home, and so the entertainment (music consumption or magazines, conversations with friends, etc.) in this part of the house could be accommodated with the domestic tasks that they were assigned. One of the teenagers consulted recalls the representation of women in domestic spaces in movies:

All films of adolescents – cartoons, series – where the protagonist is a girl, she always goes to her bedroom [...] If she has a friend, she will chat with that friend via computer or phone. However, in the movies where the protagonist is a man – he always bumps into his friends at a party or on the street, goes skating or out to experience the city instead of staying inside the house.

(A.)

Still in theoretical terms and in subsequent discussions, the hypothesis that a series of social changes that occurred from the second half of the twentieth century led to the emergence of a new bedroom culture began to be discussed and investigated. The changes relate to greater purchasing power, the size of families and patterns of interaction among its members, the development of a market of cultural goods for children and young people and the perception of parents that the streets have become dangerous for their children. There is, thus, a proliferation of electronic technologies (TV, video-game consoles, computers, etc.) in the childrens' bedrooms where more time is spent in these spaces than previous generations and less than the smartphone generation as we will explore in the next section.

Therefore, the media acquire greater relevance in this space of leisure, learning and cultural production of young people, articulating the development of identity: '[A] teenager's bedroom is where media and identity intersect: in this space media technology and content are appropriated by young people to sustain and express their sense of who they are' (Bovill and Livingstone 2001: 180). Furthermore, when the girls act as producers in this new media landscape their texts can circulate well beyond their bedrooms. This is important for girls to explore identity because the productive role in media creation is generally associated with boys and, as notes Kearney (2006: 8): 'girls' traditional feminine socialization has included learning how not to be men'.

For some girls, online social networking was very important for both feminist and student activism:

The maximum amount of information that I had these years was by Facebook, so I knew feminism and the Black Power Movement.

(G.)

Without doubt, these media alternatives [...] the internet and social networks were well important, especially to the activists girls.

(C2)

In developed countries, the bedroom culture is thought of today as being for young people (and children) – males and females, unlike the seminal discussion, in which different position of girls (in the house) and the boys (on the street) was highlighted. For authors such as Boyd (2007), this is no longer relevant due to the development of social practices linked to digital media, which have blurred the borders between private and public spaces. It is clear that this can be problematized in relation to different contexts in which connectivity is limited or when standard gender roles are socially valued or created as an obligation. However, even in such cases, the bedroom culture can encourage forms of resistance for the girls, from the possibilities of finding information on the Internet, to confronting values, developing ideas and sharing (online or offline) what they think with their friends. However, it should be noted that some adolescents believe that involvement with the political issues meant that they could move from the bedroom to public spaces, including the school, in a different way:

We built a positioning that everyone can get out on the street to blow off steam with friends and say, 'I won't get stuck in my bedroom.' The occupy school movement has brought much of this freedom because we knew the city (São Paulo) and other schools. Everyone was in the center of the city and created a more intimate relationship with the street, making us feel more secure going to a pub.

(A.)

Nevertheless, the relationship between the bedroom and the street and between online and offline can be understood as much more continuous, complementary to or as an expansion of their own private life than in terms of dichotomies.

The brief questionnaire completed by the interviewed girls revealed that they access the Internet preferably on their smartphones, which makes us think of the hypothesis raised by Lincoln (2016) about the *virtual bedroom culture*. In societies where Internet access is much more commonplace (as with the case of the São Paulo students) and with the wide dissemination of mobile devices, representations of youth identity also occur outside of the private space of the bedroom, such as in the semi-private spaces of ubiquitous social networks used by adolescents (Lincoln 2016).

In this sense, the Internet is not just used in the bedroom, but anywhere, continuing to be an important component of mobilization for these young people, and noted in the following section.

FEMALE ACTIVISM IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Mazzarella (2009) noted a tradition of women's studies in communication with first works analysed girls as passive consumers and/or victims of mass culture. In the next period, the girls were studied as an active audience. Currently, the possibilities provided by digital communication for youth challenge researchers to analyse the products created by girls.

According to the testimony of four students who participated actively in the occupation of one of the schools, the girls played a notable role offline. On the other hand, in websites created during the occupations by students the feminist posts expressed a clear sense of empowerment of students. This happens, for example, when the school was visited by Miga Secundarista

'Fight like a girl'



Figure 2: Post by 'Occupied school' about feminism (Escola de luta ETEC PJ) (2015), 'LUTE COMO UMA GAROTA! [...]', Facebook, 6 December, <https://goo.gl/yH9AB>. Accessed 4 December 2016.

collective (Figure 2). The text of the post⁷ reveals that the interpretation of the girls has the characteristic mentioned.

On carrying out a more general survey of posts on pages related to occupations on Facebook, it was observed that the adolescents were positioned actively through the publication and sharing of texts, videos and *memes* that referred to the girls' struggles, usually with the hashtags of the movement (e.g. #minasdeluta). Figure 3 shows the union of the three occupying girls with the hashtag #lutecomoumamenina (#fightlikeagirl) mashup by other new media activists.



Figure 3: Posting of content feminism Não fecham minha escolar (2015), 'MINAS DE LUTA! [...]', Facebook, 4 December, <https://goo.gl/WdVoQy>. Accessed 4 December 2016.

7. The translation of the post is as follows:

FIGHT LIKE A GIRL! The feminist women from the collective Miga Secundarista came up to our office equipment in a conversation. We met and discussed issues of our lives: women in school are starting this fight against reorganization. In fact, the education system reaches everyone, but it is stronger in reaching women. Only we know how sexism and racism in our education are oppressing and gradually wears out. For these reasons, in schools' struggle, women are the most politicized, because we were forced to take this political maturity earlier to confront the oppression in the world. Despite this, there is still a silence on the part of companions and the media with the movement's girls. In addition, it is necessary to emphasize that: the struggle of the students is a step forward for the student movement, and the role of women is a breakthrough for the feminist movement. Then we would like to send a big hug and save all those struggling, especially those who were arrested and fought with the police. We're all together, holding hands.

8. We did a content analysis on these data and these were labelled with the following themes: posts on Everyday public school occupations movement (24%), Mobilization (22%), Media (18%), Support or Help (10%), Information (10%) and Others (16%).
9. This short video illustrates this: <https://goo.gl/PNg1J7>.

The postings with an explicitly feminist connotation were not many as we found after collecting and classifying postings on Facebook pages that were active on December 2016 (42 pages). So we found, among a total of 4800 publications,⁸ about 80 posts (1.6 per cent) that related more directly to feminism; they were mainly ads of pedagogical activities and/or records of discussions related to the theme occurring in occupied schools, comments on gender equality, the occupations and also sharing of stories from the mainstream press and the alternative that covered the PSO movement, highlighting the girls' struggle. On the first point, it seems that the occupations were perceived by the vanguard of the PSO as a chance to introduce in schools a relevant discussion, often silenced, focusing on educational (a group of feminist distributed a digital manual to develop a 'school without chauvinism', replicated by pages of occupations) and even auto-formative, education among peers, as in the case of the YouTube channel, 'Minas de Luta', (Girls of Struggle), who wanted to see teenagers explain feminism to other young people.⁹

In this way, the Internet has helped in the process of building the identity of students in terms of gender and activity related to the policy (Castells 2015). We know that the digital universe does not guarantee equality between genders, or equal opportunities for interaction, as shown by the investigations on these themes, and the previous communication technologies. However, its interaction with certain cultural and social forces can lead to changes (see Herring 2003). Despite being a powerful vehicle of mass communication for the dissemination and maintenance of gender stereotypes, the Internet can be used for social change (Herring 2003).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Throughout this article, we discuss gender awareness or feminist positionality during adolescence among which the school and media gained increased and particular relevance. Empirically, the analysis focused on the PSO in São Paulo, taking especially the girls' role in this movement into consideration and the consequent visibility of these girls in the media, and their respective online and offline activisms.

Although activism and feminist theory have advanced in such a way that it seems to have been 'overcome' or 'dated', these have substantially improved women's position – especially in more developed societies; however, there is still considerable evidence of the presence of male domination (Gonçalves and Pinto 2011; Connell 2016; Ahmed 2017). It is important to observe the special features of southern women, especially through Cultural Studies, gender and media theories, including the concept of bedroom culture (McRobbie and Garber 2006; Bovill and Livingstone 2001).

Although some girls had a previous gender consciousness (before the PSO), the results of qualitative data indicated that the involvement with the cause contributed towards increasing this awareness, allowing the development of a political attitude and confrontation of the oppression and domination. On the other hand, for girls who were not familiar with feminism, the socialization involvement with the PSO (the workshops offered by feminist collectives and contact with other politicized girls) and the volume of the information retrievable produced by students in the pages of occupying social networks, especially on Facebook, allowed the development of these sensibilities, to the point of making possible confrontation of oppression and increased gender debates in education.

For the interviewed group, the educational and feminism activities had a most obvious expression offline. However, when we observed the practices of these activist girls online and offline, it became clear that the intertwining of these dimensions, increasingly early, can lead to the development of a youth feminist sociability in present times, with a strong potential for growth. In this experience, there is a concern to socially change (for example, making schools free from sexism) as feminism can represent a real struggle against social oppressions, not just a 'lifestyle' (Miguel and Biroli 2014).

When we consider the research data from the intersectional perspective, we realize that poorer girls who had less family support for the cause had to search on issues on the Internet such as 'being a feminist'. Among the three girls who pointed this out, two were black. On the other hand, the three white girls who had family support to participate in the PSO did not consider digital media very important.

According to Ahmed (2017), feminism is a homework, is personal and you need to first understand it alone and in the bedroom. The activist girls who we talked to seemed to do their homework well; however, some were supported by their parents whilst others found this support on social media.

Finally, an interesting finding in our focus group results emerged frequently in the general student reports: the idea that, after the occupations, the school was viewed as a friendlier, safer and a more pleasant place – which corresponds to the common notion of what a bedroom should be like.

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Representing diverse femininities on Instagram: A case study of the body-positive @effyourbeautystandards Instagram account

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on a critical analysis of alternative representations of femininities on Instagram through a case study of the @effyourbeautystandards account. This body-positive account aims to promote self-love and questions beauty ideals by sharing self-representations of 'ordinary' women (i.e. non-models or celebrities) who feel that they do not live up to the current beauty standards. We focus on the political potential of these diverse self-representations in terms of 'everyday activism'. @effyourbeautystandards is recognized as having an overtly political stance, adopting an intersectional approach and employing strategies of 'empowering exhibitionism'. Yet, the article questions this more optimistic view by critically addressing the postfeminist sensibilities underlying the account, namely, its emphasis on fashion and beauty. Moreover, Instagram's role in reproducing traditional gender

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self-representation
Instagram
social media
femininity
#effyourbeauty
standards

1. As per July 2017.

norms is explored. The article analyses Instagram's technological and sociocultural affordances, such as its Terms of Use, and the 'editorial power' of the users' likes, comments and reports.

INTRODUCING THE CASE STUDY OF THE BODY-POSITIVE @EFFYOURBEAUTYSTANDARDS INSTAGRAM ACCOUNT

In February 2013, Tessa Holliday – a North American plus-size model and self-identified feminist – created the body-positive @effyourbeautystandards Instagram account. Starting from the idea that 'plus-size women should not be restricted in their fashion choices' (effyourbeautystandards 2013), Tessa Holliday invited 'ordinary' women everywhere to share their own self-representations and selfies using the homonymous hashtag #effyourbeautystandards. She encouraged women to embrace their own bodies and respective representations as *beautiful*, even if they did not match the socially constructed beauty ideals (Cwynar-Horta 2016: 38).

Holliday's call resonated with countless women and, according to an article in *The Telegraph*, within days the hashtag had already been used in hundreds of posts (Gordon 2016), amounting to nearly two million shared images in 2017. The images posted under the hashtag #effyourbeautystandards are then selected by the account administrators (Tessa Holliday herself, along with seven other body-positive women and one man) and shared in the popular @effyourbeautystandards Instagram account, which presently has approximately 360,000 followers.¹

The @effyourbeautystandards account illustrates the complexity of the politics of self-representation. This article aims to explore the broad dynamics of gendered self-representation on Instagram and its political potential in the specific context of the body-positive @effyourbeautystandards Instagram account. It questions how diverse representations of femininities are constructed through the self-representations of 'ordinary' women.

This article analyses Instagram's potential for producing diverse self-representations of feminine bodies but also the limitations as the use of Instagram can also be linked to the reproduction of traditional gender stereotypes (Döring et al. 2016).

This case study conducted a direct unstructured observation (Given 2008: 907–08) of the feed of the @effyourbeautystandards account, its photographs, descriptions and comments accompanying the photos. The feed was observed from January until February 2017, but the analysis extended diachronically, reaching the account's first post, from February 2013. The analysis started with an attentive scrolling through the @effyourbeautystandards Instagram feed in order to get an overview of the kinds of discourses and representations shared. This approach was complemented by an analysis of website articles and online newspaper stories that discussed the @effyourbeautystandards account. These discourses were providing us with contextual information, allowing us to make sense of the broader reception of the account. These insights deepened the theoretical discussions.

This article is divided into four main sections. The first, and current, section briefly introduces the @effyourbeautystandards Instagram account, situating it in the contemporary discussion of narrow beauty ideals. The second section discusses the political potential of the studied account, exploring users' active participation in creating more diverse representations. The third section

presents an increasingly critical stance, exploring the ambivalent position of the @effyourbeautystandards project, simultaneously an active fourth-wave feminist effort while still maintaining some postfeminist sensibilities. The fourth and final section explores the existing constraints to self-representation on Instagram, and how these affect the @effyourbeautystandards account and other body-positive efforts on Instagram.

Earlier scholarship on media and its role in the construction of socially accepted standards of beauty has focused on traditional media formats, such as magazines or television (e.g. Duke and Kreshel 1998; MacDonald 1995/2003). The media has been recognized as being able to construct and reproduce powerful 'myths of femininity' (MacDonald 1995/2003). More recently, several works focusing on women's uses of digital and social media (e.g. Burns 2015; Murray 2015; Retallack et al. 2016; Rettberg 2014; Warfield 2014) have emerged.

This research follows the same theoretical framing within the discipline of feminist media studies, expanding this scholarship to the field of Instagram and focusing specifically on its representations of women and femininities. This focus stems not only from the specificities of the case study of the @effyourbeautystandards account – where the majority of shared images are self-representations of women – but also from the general predominance of women, who are amongst the most active users of Instagram (Greenwood et al. 2016).

This research acknowledges that men are also affected by over-idealized representations of masculinities in media and social media (e.g. Iovannone 2016; Siibak 2010), often facing harsh judgements on their appearances and masculine beauty standards, especially amongst certain sub-groups of masculinities, such as young queer-identifying men (Iovannone 2016). However, women are disproportionately judged and valued by their physical appearance (Wagner et al. 2016).

Nowadays, both traditional mainstream media and much of the social media seem to privilege a narrow feminine beauty ideal that is defined not only by a thin body but also by other beauty-related attributes – such as attractive facial features, flawless complexion, well-styled hair, etc. – most often 'photoshopped' to an unachievable perfection (Engeln-Maddox 2006). This ideal is profoundly exclusionary, leaving ageing women, disabled people and women of colour, for instance, largely underrepresented (Tiidenberg and Gómez Cruz 2015: 3). Furthermore, these diverse forms of femininities often get misrepresented in traditional mainstream media, representing only even narrower specific standards – for example, the typical comic-relief fat female characters represented in movies (Johnston and Taylor 2008: 953).

This narrow ideal becomes the near-impossible standard that women compare themselves to. Since for the majority of women this ideal is physically impossible to achieve, it may lead to feelings of inadequacy and to seeing their bodies as in constant need of improvement (Malkin et al. 1999: 647). Women whose bodies present characteristics that are deemed as 'flaws' to this ideal, for example excessive fat or body hair, become labelled as 'less attractive' and are thus often stigmatized (Englis et al. 1994: 50).

Women are, nevertheless, often critical of the beauty ideals presented in media, recognizing that these images do not represent most women and are unrealistic and unattainable (Engeln-Maddox 2006: 259). Body-positive projects, such as the @effyourbeautystandards Instagram account, aim to echo this critical stance and the long-standing call to create greater diversity in media representations of women (Gill 2007).

Some body-positive initiatives (e.g. the Dove Real Beauty campaign) have been criticized for not being sufficiently inclusive – still focusing on mostly white, conventionally attractive, slightly plus-size women (Johnston and Taylor 2008). @effyourbeautystandards tries to avoid the same mistake by adopting an intersectional approach, starting with its selection of a diverse range of account administrators – amongst whom are a South Asian plus-size woman (Tonic 2015) and an African American plus-size man – and until recently counting on the collaboration of a British Sikh woman who proudly flaunts a full beard due to polycystic ovary syndrome (Bell 2015). The diversity of the chosen administrators is often praised in the media discourses about the account (e.g. Bell 2015; Tonic 2015). Furthermore, direct observation of the @effyourbeautystandards Instagram feed allows to notice that the careful curation by the account administrators is reflected in the sharing of self-representations of an incredibly diverse range of people: with different weights, races, body-abilities, religions and genders.

Taking advantage of the potentialities of social media, @effyourbeautystandards aims to be a critical response to the unrealistic beauty ideals often shared in traditional mainstream media (Gill and Elias 2014: 180). By sharing diverse representations of ‘ordinary people’, it seeks to disrupt the dominant ideals of femininity and beauty (Cwynar-Horta 2016: 37). However, as we will discuss in the following sections, both in social media and in the @effyourbeautystandards account, tensions between established ideals of femininity and non-conforming representations remain present.

SELF-REPRESENTATIONS ON @EFFYOURBEAUTYSTANDARDS AND THE POLITICS OF INSTAGRAM

Instagram is based on users’ active participation and self-representations; as such it seems to offer the possibility for a more diverse representation of women and femininities. Departing from the one-to-many model of traditional media, Instagram allows ‘ordinary’ people greater access to the tools of media production, thus potentially democratizing representations (Humphreys and Vered 2014: 5). Projects such as @effyourbeautystandards embrace and magnify the diversity that this shift from representations made by others to self-representations can bring. Diversity, in the context of @effyourbeautystandards, focuses mainly on a diversity of feminine body types and beauty standards, although the account does include, to a lesser degree, gender-queer representations. A critical study of those queer representations, however, is beyond the scope of this article.

The increased availability of media production tools, brought on by the integration of smartphones in everyday life and by social media such as Instagram, becomes especially valuable for women – who have traditionally been equated with the consumption of media, rather than with production. Women now have new possibilities to produce and distribute their own media (Kanai and Dobson 2016: 1). It must be noted, however, that the access to digital technologies is not equally distributed, but often concentrated among the young and privileged. There is still a ‘digital divide’ that prevents some women access to the tools of representation (Schuster 2013: 11).

Self-representation allows users a greater agency and near-complete control over the process of creating images (Wagner et al. 2016). They can decide when to take the photograph, how to frame it, how to pose, how to

edit it and finally, whether or not to share it. This newly gained control is often described as one of the main reasons why young women enjoy creating self-representations (Rettberg 2014: 80). Self-representation thus offers an opportunity to avoid misrepresentations that often occur when others are in charge of creating one's image (Syme 2015). Through photographic self-representations, women can explore the visuality of their own bodies, learning which angles and poses they find visually pleasing, finding the beauty in it, even if their bodies do not comply with the socially defined beauty standards (Tiidenberg and Gómez Cruz 2015: 13).

Yet, irrespective of their popularity and wide acceptance, traditional media have generally reacted to the rise of self-representation and particularly of the selfie phenomenon – simply defined as a photograph one takes of oneself, usually with a smartphone or a digital camera, and that is later shared on social media (Tiidenberg 2016: 1564) – with noticeable disdain. Countless articles have dismissed this form of self-representation as common and trivial, excluded from the realm of 'proper portrait photography' (Burns 2015: 63–64). Moreover, perhaps paradoxically, such self-representations are often deemed to be narcissistic. Such a simplistic understanding disdains self-representations as tools for shameless self-promotion and a cry for attention (Tifentale and Manovich 2014: 6).

The creation of self-representations and selfies, especially by young women whose bodies do not fit into the narrow beauty ideals, may be accompanied by anxiety, anticipating the mockery that the pictures might receive (Syme 2015). Nonetheless, the self-representation phenomenon continues to grow. This means that people 'must be getting something out of it, something so life-affirming that it makes the harshness endurable' (Syme 2015).

There is a certain 'political' character underlying all self-representation on Instagram. 'Political' relates, on a first level, to *everyday politics* (Highfield 2016) and *everyday activism* (Vivienne and Burgess 2012). In this way, political themes are being framed around personal experiences and interests (Highfield 2016: 3). It views the simple act of sharing personal representations and stories of previously marginalized groups of people – such as women whose bodies do not fit into the current beauty standards – in a public (online) space as a catalyst for social change, challenging popular stereotypes (Vivienne and Burgess 2012: 363). Thus, even when self-representations on Instagram are not created with a deliberate political goal in mind, they nonetheless become political by declaring who gets to occupy the public's visual field (Syme 2015).

When created by non-conventional women, these self-representations can carry the potential of displacing the culturally established narratives of ideal femininity by offering a 'view from elsewhere' (De Lauretis 1987: 25). This potential is especially noticeable in the context of @effyourbeautystandards, where users choose to share their diverse and often non-conforming self-representations, thus enacting a resistance at the 'local' level.

In the case of the @effyourbeautystandards account, the political potential of self-representation on Instagram is openly recognized and harnessed by the women creating self-representations. @effyourbeautystandards claims feminist ideas and body-activism efforts, urging women to deliberately use their newly found control over self-representation to empower themselves and free themselves from repressive social norms and beauty ideals, renegotiating these ideals and emphasizing the existing diversity in women's bodies, much like the fat activist bloggers studied by Affula and Ricciardelli (2015).

In this way, the @effyourbeautystandards account seems to exemplify the political potential of self-representation on Instagram as it shows an immensity of diverse representations of people who do not fit the narrow parameters of beauty valued by popular media – consisting almost exclusively of young, white, able-bodied, seemingly heterosexual, well-groomed, thin and conventionally attractive women (Gill 2007: 12). Women of the most varied weights, ages, races, ethnicities, religions, sexualities and cultures share their self-representations on @effyourbeautystandards. This growing visibility, reaching an enormous audience of over 300 thousand people, can help to normalize diversity and challenge restrictive views of women's representation (Burns 2015: 90). This practice can be understood as a form of 'empowering exhibitionism', rejecting the socially imposed regime of shame (Tiidenberg 2014: 2–3).

But the political potential of body-positive projects such as @effyourbeautystandards cannot be accepted with wholehearted optimism. The actual range and political impact of projects such as @effyourbeautystandards can be more limited than one might hope, when considering the effect of the so-called 'filter bubbles' (Pariser 2011). The term filter bubble refers to the idea that one's online media consumption mirrors one's own interests, world-views and political agendas (Pariser 2011). The media that one encounters on social media – either due to algorithms that predict users' taste and use patterns to suggest similar content, or due to self-selected personalization (Borgesius 2016: 3) – can create a skewed vision of the world, sheltered from different opinions and diverse ideas (Pariser 2011: 11–13). As a consequence of this self-selected personalization, social media users might choose to follow people who hold like-minded opinions (Borgesius 2016: 4). There is thus the possibility, albeit unexplored in the scope of this analysis, that many of the followers of @effyourbeautystandards already share a somewhat body-positive mindset, limiting the range of visibility and political potential of the account to a very specific audience.

Instagram can sometimes also be linked to the creation, reproduction and internalization of damaging beauty ideals (e.g. Brown and Tiggemann 2016; Vandenbosch and Eggermont 2013). Outside of the confines of body-positive communities such as @effyourbeautystandards, this potential to extend representation beyond the defined beauty ideals and gendered stereotypes tends not to be realized. Self-representations on Instagram are often conceived in extremely normative ways, reproducing traditional gender stereotypes and ideals of femininity, rather than actually creating non-hegemonic gender representations (Döring et al. 2016: 957). The self-representations shared through Instagram do not exist independently from the pressures of the offline world. They are often subjected to the same social norms and constraints (Sveningsson Elm 2009: 243–44).

Furthermore, self-representation on Instagram does not exist in a cultural void. It is intertextual, embedded in popular culture and as such it re-appropriates – often unconsciously – the texts and conventions of traditional mainstream media to construct one's own image through a process of 'bricolage' (De Ridder and Van Bauwel 2015: 334). This cultural and media influence can be noted on social media, even in the politically charged representations of @effyourbeautystandards. The observation of the account's feed draws attention to a large number of self-representations showing women in fashionable poses and attitudes, quite reminiscent of women's magazines, showing off their fashion choices or their expertly applied make-up.

@EFFYOURBEAUTYSTANDARDS, BETWEEN FOURTH-WAVE FEMINISM AND A POSTFEMINIST SENSIBILITY

The body-positive @effyourbeautystandards Instagram account assumes an overtly political stance, positing body acceptance as a feminist issue. The goals of the @effyourbeautystandards account, in line with those of the broader body-positivity and fat activism movements (Affula and Ricciardelli 2015), are to increase visibility of diverse representations of individuals who have been misrepresented or underrepresented in traditional mainstream media; promote self-love and acceptance towards stigmatized bodies; expose and challenge the unrealistic socially constructed gender and beauty ideals; and to rally others to rebel against restrictive social norms.

@effyourbeautystandards can be understood as a display of the still-contested fourth-wave feminism (Chamberlain 2017; Dean and Aune 2015; Munro n.d.) in action, sharing some of its key tenets.

The so-called fourth-wave feminism is understood as a contemporary public resurgence of feminist discourses and ideals (Chamberlain 2017: 1). This wave is seen as a continuation of previous feminist efforts in the ongoing fight for gender equality (Chamberlain 2017: 7). It adopts second-wave ideas of consciousness-raising through the sharing of personal experiences (Aitken 2017: 6–7), and a third-wave focus on micropolitics of the everyday and attention to the intersections of gender with ethnicity, class, sexuality, disability and religion (Dean and Aune 2015: 5).

Taking advantage of the potentialities brought by the Internet, and particularly by social media, fourth-wave feminism allows for new modes of dissemination of information, participation and engagement (Chamberlain 2017). Social media not only allow for an easier and quicker mobilization of activists (Chamberlain 2017: 107–08) but also for marginalized groups of people to claim a voice and share their own self-representations (Chamberlain 2017: 4), providing a platform for a large variety of people to engage with feminism (Retallack et al. 2016: 86–87).

But the effective political impact of these online efforts is still under question. Some accuse these efforts to be a form of ‘slacktivism’, a sense of disconnection between the awareness of a political cause through social media and the actual political action taken towards it (Glenn 2015: 81–82). Fourth-wave feminism is often understood as a departure from the more traditional forms of activism (e.g. protests or boycotts), being overly reliant in online forms of activism that require minimal effort (Schuster 2013: 10). ‘Slacktivism’ is thus often sceptically associated with the discussion of online and fourth-wave feminism, to question its legitimacy, the potential political impact of social media and the effectiveness of its online efforts. It frames online campaigning and digital movements as passive engagements with feminist political causes, without having any impact over real political decision-making (Schuster 2013: 10) or enacting any ‘real’ social change (Aitken 2017: 8).

Nevertheless, the observation of the feed of the @effyourbeautystandards account shows that many of the shared images maintain an overt critique of the unachievable images of beauty and femininity often promoted by traditional media. Reclaiming the postfeminist idea of bodily display as a sign of strength and empowerment (Burns 2015: 197), @effyourbeautystandards seeks to subvert the social expectation that women should be ashamed and try to cover their perceived flaws, such as excess fat or body hair. On the feed of the @effyourbeautystandards account abound images of confident-looking

women, posing in bikinis, underwear or even semi-nude, showing off their fat bellies, cellulite, scars, colostomy bags and countless other stigmatized attributes. This reclaiming of online visibility, flaunting their diverse bodies and refusing to cover their so-called 'flaws', can be read as an active resistance against social norms, an attempt to renegotiate the sense of how feminine bodies should look like (Affula and Ricciardelli 2015: 454).

Yet, as it was mentioned, the use of Instagram cannot be read in a wholly positive light for it can also contribute to the creation and reproduction of beauty ideals and societal norms of femininity (e.g. Brown and Tiggemann 2016; Vandenbosch and Eggermont 2013). There is a noticeable influence of postfeminism and of still-existing postfeminist sensibilities on both Instagram and the @effyourbeautystandards account. This contemporary understanding of postfeminism departs from earlier conceptions of postfeminism (Gill 2007; McRobbie 2009), which were marked by an open dismissal and contempt for feminist ideas, rejecting this kind of political engagement as out-of-date and simply 'unnecessary'. These earlier conceptions of postfeminism had a strong emphasis on fashion, beauty and physical appearance, equating bodily display and sexiness with empowerment. This postfeminist discourse takes the feminist emphasis on empowerment and choice, and incorporates it into media and popular culture, presenting a simplified version of feminism that focuses on the body and the pursuit of beauty, thereby losing its political edge (McRobbie 2009).

Although more recently feminism seems to have fallen back into 'fashion' amongst celebrities and popular media (Maclaran 2015: 1732), Rosalind Gill (2016) defends that some of these current media representations actually retain several of the characteristics of a contemporary postfeminist sensibility (Gill 2016). Although they no longer show an open dismissal of feminism, they often maintain an equation of bodily display with sexual empowerment, an emphasis on fashion and beauty and a reliance on a discourse of individualism and personal agency as a sort-of substitute for a more direct forms of activism (Gill 2016: 613).

This postfeminist sensibility is noticeable in the idea that women are required to produce themselves 'as feminine', through feminine efforts such as make-up, hair styling, fashion, dieting, grooming, etc. (e.g. Gill 2007; Stuart and Donaghue 2011). These efforts are generally constructed as pleasurable experimentation, to such an extent that it obscures the normative societal expectations for women to engage with such beautification efforts (Gill 2007: 188–89). Yet, this aestheticization of the body is immensely socially significant. To neglect it – or worse, to defiantly oppose it – often puts at risk the security of one's gender identity as properly feminine (Sveningsson Elm 2009: 249).

Although @effyourbeautystandards attempts to directly address and renegotiate the blind adherence to these beauty standards, observation shows that, to a certain degree, this postfeminism sensibility (Gill 2007) still remains in the body-positive account. According both to the inaugural posts of the account itself and to the articles written about it (e.g. Gordon 2016), the @effyourbeautystandards account was primarily created with a focus on challenging the limiting fashion standards to which plus-size women are subjected. The first post addresses plus-size women by reminding them that they can still be fashionable and wear all those 'daring' clothing items that fashion standards mark as out-of-bounds – bikinis, sleeveless tops, pencil skirts, crop tops, etc. (effyourbeautystandards 2013).

As both media discourses about the account and the observation of the account itself show, @effyourbeautystandards still works within a hegemonic frame that maintains a marked emphasis on *beauty* and *sexiness* as essential parts of femininities (Johnston and Taylor 2008: 954). The inaugural post concludes by stating: 'We will take back our right to be a total babe regardless of our size [...] big OR small we all deserve to feel beautiful' (effyourbeautystandards 2013, original emphasis). This emphasis on beauty can also be observed on the prevalent supportive comments that often accompany the shared self-representations. These comments praise non-conforming bodies in a surprisingly postfeminist discourse, praising the other women's appearances, emphasizing that women are 'beautiful just the way they are' and sexy irrespective of their size (Gill and Elias 2014: 182). Furthermore, these discourses can sometimes overlook the non-conforming aspects of the represented bodies, praising instead the ways in which such bodies align with beauty norms. This tendency is especially clear when looking into the media's compliments to the @effyourbeautystandards creator, Tessa Holliday, emphasizing her conventionally attractive face and flawless complexion, glossing over her weight (e.g. Gordon 2016; Plantamura 2015).

Furthermore, the 'edginess' and potentially resistant character of body-positive movements, such as @effyourbeautystandards, can be absorbed and incorporated into the production of traditional media representations (Krijnen and Van Bauwel 2015: 119) and commercially driven marketing campaigns (e.g. the 2004 Dove Real Beauty campaign or the 2014 Aerie Real campaign). This might suggest that feminist ideals of more diverse beauty standards have ceased to be socially dismissed and marginalized, having entered the social mainstream (Johnston and Taylor 2008: 948). However, the choices of representation made by such 'body-positive' marketing campaigns are naturally profit driven. Their goal is to sell products, paradoxically often aimed at beautifying women. As such they promote a sort of 'feminist consumerism' that reformulates empowerment and self-care as achievable through personal grooming and shopping. These campaigns not only often show a limited range of diverse women's bodies, showing slight deviations to the current beauty ideal, but they also overlook the emotional hardships of failing to meet the beauty standard, thus removing a layer of complexity to the body-positive movement (Johnston and Taylor 2008). These campaigns thus assimilate the aesthetics of 'resisting' self-representations, creating a simplified and relatively depoliticized version of it (Duguay 2016: 3), since a more radical critique might negatively affect sales (Johnston and Taylor 2008: 962).

Projects such as @effyourbeautystandard thus seem to occupy a complex middle ground between overt fourth-wave feminist goals and more conforming postfeminist sensibilities. To approach such a project must thus necessarily be a tentative critical endeavour (Gill 2007: 38). It must be open to the notion that multiple and even contradictory ideas can always coexist in a same moment (Gill 2016: 622).

THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONAL FILTERS IN CONSTRAINING SELF-REPRESENTATION ON @EFFYOURBEAUTYSTANDARDS

Although we appear free to share whatever we please on social media, the construction of self-representations on Instagram and on the @effyourbeautystandards account is also constrained and shaped by 'institutional filters' (Thumim 2012). These filters arise from the fact that social networking sites,

such as Instagram, are carefully designed to elicit certain kinds of responses and representations (Thumim 2012: 153). There are several constraints to the use of any specific social media platform, both technological and sociocultural, that help to shape its use and its practices: certain affordances of the interface itself help to determine what can be represented through the platform (Livingstone 2008). As such, Instagram, as a technological platform, is not neutral. It embodies a specific 'platform politics', shaped by the company ideologies and commercial interests (Duguay 2016: 3). These politics shape how users interact with the platform and the kinds of self-representations that they create on it. The platform itself does not wholly determine how users will make use of it, but it does nonetheless 'frame' such uses (Livingstone 2008: 396).

Some of these constraints act through the design of the platform interface itself – through the buttons, scroll bars, menus and icons that guide the users' interaction with the platform. These technical features only allow certain kinds of actions, thus limiting the possible uses (Van Dijck 2013: 31). However, within the scope of this analysis, these constraints are understood not only in a strict sense of technological affordances, focusing exclusively on the technological capabilities of a social media platforms – such as interface design, code, algorithms, etc. [...] – but also as the socio-technological affordances of the platform that reflect the 'politics of platforms' and the expected uses and acceptable discourses of such a platform (Duguay 2016). Following this understanding, we can thus look at Instagram's *Terms of Use* as a socio-technological affordance that shapes and constrains the relationships of users with the platform, revealing its norms and values (Van Dijck 2013: 34). These *Terms of Use* reflect the 'governance structures' of social media, regulating its use, amongst its claims to intellectual propriety, privacy and acceptable behaviours. They directly impose restraints and obligations, social norms that can later be contested or disputed by users (Van Dijck 2013: 38). As such, individual uses also affect the politics of platforms: users can renegotiate the uses of the platform, appropriate them in their own everyday lives and adapt them to their own interests and goals (Van Dijck 2013: 6).

Instagram's *Terms of Use* (2016) are regulating what can be shared on the platform and what is liable to be deleted. They impose direct constraints over the self-representations shared on Instagram, prohibiting the sharing of full or partial nudity, of sexually explicit or pornographic photographs and violent, discriminatory or illegal content.

While these *Terms of Use* seem, at a first glance, do not affect the kind of self-representations shared on the body-positive @effyourbeautystandards Instagram account, their actual implications can be more far-reaching. Instagram's vague *Terms of Use* rely on somewhat ambiguous divisions between appropriate and inappropriate body representations (Olszanowski 2014: 84). As such, as a *Dazed Digital* article on censorship on Instagram points out, the representations regarded as 'inappropriate' are not limited to explicit nude or pornographic images, but often include images of women's bodies that refuse to adhere to the dominant beauty standards and narrow ideals of femininity (Todd 2015), much like the self-representations shared on @effyourbeautystandards.

A blatant example, widely discussed in online media (e.g. Andersen 2015; Slade 2015; Wagner 2015), of these 'institutional filters' on Instagram was the 2015 ban of the hashtag #curvy from the list of searchable hashtags (Wagner 2015). This hashtag was widely used by plus-size women on Instagram, including many of the users on @effyourbeautystandards, to proudly share

their self-representations in a celebratory manner (Andersen 2015). While the hashtag contained photographs of women in their bikinis, lingerie or sometimes even nude, the majority of images were of fully clothed women with accompanying comments on body image issues (Slade 2015). Yet an Instagram spokesperson justified the decision to ban the popular #curvy hashtag by stating that it was used to share 'inappropriate content' that often violated Instagram's community guidelines on nudity (Slade 2015). This justification was publicly contested, with people pointing out that countless other hashtags that were more directly related to nudity were still searchable on Instagram, such as #vagina or #peniseverywhere (Andersen 2015). Instagram replied to this criticism by stating that the decision to ban a certain hashtag from the search feature is not a result of the actual meaning of the banned word, but rather of the prevalence of inappropriate content associated with the term (Wagner 2015).

Yet, the decision to ban #curvy for its inappropriate content seems consistent with the tendency of Instagram to delete images of non-conforming bodies, even when such images do not directly infringe the *Terms of Use*. As many online articles note (e.g. Andersen 2015; Todd 2015), Instagram has deemed inappropriate images of breast-feeding women, stretch marks, pubic hair, menstruation-stained clothing and even classical nude works of art (Andersen 2015). Instagram's distinctions between appropriate and inappropriate representations of women are as such consistent with the current beauty standards and norms of femininity, echoing the general policing of women's bodies (Todd 2015). This creates an unreliable environment for body-positive accounts, with images of non-conforming bodies facing higher risks of being removed by Instagram (Olszanowski 2015: 232–33).

However, the defiant responses from body-positive users to the ban of the #curvy hashtag also exemplify how individual users can affect the politics of the platform. After the ban, users not only expressed their discontent on their personal Instagram posts and through popular websites (e.g. Andersen 2015; Slade 2015; Wagner 2015) but also found creative manners to avoid the ban, adopting alternative hashtags to promote their body-positive messages – such as #curvee, #stillcurvy or #bringcurvyback (Wagner 2015). Amongst the hashtags used to express the backlash against this ban, #effyourbeautystandards became especially popular (Andersen 2015).

As a result of this backlash, Instagram conceded to partially lift the ban on the #curvy hashtag (Wagner 2015). At the time of writing, Instagram allows a few carefully selected images to be presented on the webpage of the hashtag #curvy, accompanied by a message stating that recent publications marked with the hashtag are hidden because they might infringe the *Terms of Use* (Wagner 2015). The hashtag cannot, however, be directly searched on the app, but is only accessible via a direct URL.

The sharing of resistant body-positive self-representations through hashtags and Instagram accounts such as @effyourbeautystandards can have an empowering potential, increasing the visibility of a larger diversity of women beyond the echo chamber of any single user's current followers (Olszanowski 2015: 234–35). On the other hand this increased visibility also increases the chances of encountering online harassment, 'flagging' and 'reporting' by other users (Olszanowski 2015). By flaunting stigmatized bodily 'flaws', such as excessive fat or body hair, these self-representations become a possible target for further bullying and stigmatization, often attracting backlash and hostile Instagram comments, with insults, jokes and critiques of

unhealthiness and lack of personal care, so often associated with plus-size and non-conforming bodies (Affula and Ricciardelli 2015: 455).

This exemplifies some of the ways in which other Instagram users can exercise a sort of 'editorial power' that can constrain the kinds of representations shared in the platform. Users can approve of representations by giving them 'likes' and positive comments, expressing their support and encouragement through compliments. Or they can show their disapproval through the aforementioned hostile comments or by 'reporting' the images that they consider inappropriate (Enli and Thumim 2012: 93).

As such, the power underlying the representation politics on Instagram is not a 'top-down' power. It is not solely enforced by a team of contracted Instagram workers who select all the photographs and accounts considered inappropriate according to its *Terms of Use*. Rather, it is a more diffuse and unbounded form of power (Burns 2015), spread over its whole user base, whereby users can trigger the banning of certain images and accounts by 'flagging' and 'reporting' inappropriate content (Olszanowski 2014: 88–89), according to their own subjective understanding of appropriateness.

Furthermore, this 'editorial power' is differently directed according to gender. As such, women's self-representations – especially those that refuse to conform to the accepted beauty standards – are more likely to be met with hostility and even vilification (Burns 2015; Warfield 2014).

Users' scrutiny and judgements thus serve to regulate Instagram's self-representations, punishing those who stray too far from the desired norms (Burns 2015), sometimes including non-conforming images such as the ones shared on @effyourbeautystandards. This can pressure users to exert a tighter self-regulation over their representations and to shape them to the socially approved ideals (Burns 2015: 77).

It is this user feedback that is largely responsible for the enforcement of Instagram's *Terms of Use*. Often, it is only after negative user critiques that Instagram takes action, deleting the 'offending' photographs (Olszanowski 2014: 88–89). This reliance on individual judgement can lead to erroneous bans since users often 'flag' photographs of bodies that do not fit the current beauty standards – even though these images do not infringe the *Terms of Use* of Instagram – simply because these users are uncomfortable with such representations, as noted in an online article discussing one of such misguided bans (Kabas 2014).

As such, these institutional filters and the diffuse power exerted by users' judgements can serve to restrict the political potential of Instagram and of body-positive accounts such as @effyourbeautystandards to enable a larger diversity of ideals of femininity, limiting its radical visibility (Burns 2015: 167).

CONCLUSION

The case study of the @effyourbeautystandards account provides an example of how Instagram can be used to share alternative representations of gender, particularly of femininities. It illustrates the ways in which self-representation can generate public visibility for a larger diversity of 'ordinary' women, who feel that they do not fit the current narrow ideals of femininity and its beauty standards.

@effyourbeautystandards adopts an intersectional approach, sharing the self-representations and selfies of an incredibly diverse range of women, thus aiming to promote ideals of self-love and bodily acceptance. As such,

@effyourbeautystandards adopts a clear critical stance against the beauty standards often promoted by traditional media, recognizing them as unrealistic and unachievable (Engeln-Maddox 2006: 259).

The @effyourbeautystandards account makes explicit the political potential that self-representation on Instagram can have – both as everyday activism (Vivienne and Burgess 2012) and as a deliberately political fourth-wave feminism (Munro n.d.). It proclaims as its goal to contest the socially established beauty standards, through a strategy of increased visibility, proudly flaunting the representations of non-conforming bodies. This increased visibility aims to help to normalize diversity, reshaping the current discourses of femininity (Affula and Ricciardelli 2015: 462).

Yet, the approach to this case study seeks to avoid an overly optimistic view of the political potentialities of such body-positive projects, also considering the ways in which Instagram can be drawn from the intertextual influence of popular media (De Ridder and Van Bauwel 2015: 334), thus potentially being used to reinforce beauty ideals (e.g. Brown and Tiggemann 2016; Döring et al. 2016).

The influence of postfeminist sensibilities (Gill 2016) in @effyourbeautystandards is recognizable, particularly through its emphasis on being 'fashionable' at any size, and its focus on ideas of beauty and sexiness. As such, it still functions within the same hegemonic frame that positions beauty as essential to femininity (Johnston and Taylor 2008: 954), although seeking to expand the limits of the beauty standards.

Finally, the case study also illustrates the ways in which institutional limitations (Thumim 2012) – imposed by Instagram's *Terms of Use* and by the diffuse power (Burns 2015) exerted by users' 'likes', 'comments' and 'reports' – can constrain the possibilities for diverse representation on Instagram. Relying on vague distinctions between appropriate and inappropriate (Olszanowski 2014: 84), users can use their feedback as a form of discipline, punishing those representations that stray too far from the ideal norms (Burns 2015). These institutional constraints thus limit the political potential for radical visibility of diverse bodies on Instagram.

Departing from a feminist position that focuses particularly on the importance of diverse representations and inclusive politics of visibility, it is tempting to share the enthusiasm and optimism that seems to emerge with the possibilities for self-representations on Instagram and on social media in general. There is a sense of promise brought on by projects such as @effyourbeautystandards, which seem to carry a much-needed conversation on unrealistic beauty ideals to an incredibly large audience. However, there is a need to remain critical, recognizing how even such overtly feminist efforts can contribute towards a continued emphasis on fashion and beauty as essential to femininity. As such, we must seek to advance both our understandings of the political potentialities of Instagram and our approaches to such platforms. We should seek to engage with such issues from different angles. Only then will we be able to recognize how feminist initiatives such as @effyourbeautystandards can be contradictory at times; they juxtapose clear fourth-wave feminist goals to challenge gender stereotypes (Munro n.d.) with a postfeminist sensibility that remains centred on ideas of beauty and sexiness (Gill 2016). There is no definite, irrefutable position to be taken on the @effyourbeautystandards account; rather, this study remains in an inherently tentative position, recognizing that every possibility for online resistance is always inevitably accompanied by constraints.

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Personal Style Blogs

Appearances that Fascinate
By Rosie Findlay



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From Style Rookie to Style Bubble, personal style blogs exploded onto the scene in the mid-2000s giving voice to young and stylish writers who had their own unique take on the seasonal fashion cycle and how to curate an individual style within the shifting swirl of trends. *Personal Style Blogs* examines the history and rise of style blogging and looks closely at the relationship between bloggers and their (often anonymous) readers as well as the response of the fashion industry to style bloggers' amateur and often unauthorized fashion reportage.

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TV PROGRAMMES

Game of Thrones (2011–present, USA: HBO).

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